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March 2016

MAGAZINE

**Embassy Bratislava promotes
acceptance of refugees**

**Quick reaction by Embassy
team saves lives in Bamako**



**Consulate General Bridges
Cultural Divides in Ancient City**

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Jerusalem glows at night as seen in this high dynamic range image.
Photo by Isaac D. Pacheco

STATE MAGAZINE



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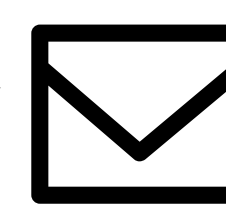
Deadlines

**The submission deadline for the May issue is March 20.
The deadline for the June issue is April 20.**

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From left, Ambassador Joe Macmanus, head of the Executive Secretariat, Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Heather Higginbottom and Director General Arnold Chacon.
Photo by Stefano Rivolta

Conversations on Leadership Podcast

The latest episode of the DG's podcast "Conversations on Leadership" featured Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Heather Higginbottom and Ambassador Joe Macmanus, head of the Executive Secretariat. The following is an excerpt from the podcast.

On becoming a leader:

Macmanus: "Your self-selecting as somebody who creates teams, who starts conversations, who looks for opportunities in terms of volunteering to participate in activities, either in your office or bureau or outside of it, gives you an opportunity to stand forward and to create for yourself the kinds of relationships that help encourage you in development as a leader."

Higginbottom: "There's doing the work, but then there's driving an outcome, and not simply being busy with the work of what we have to do every day just to process information and so forth, but really ensuring that we're furthering an objective."

On political and career diplomats working together:

Higginbottom: "How do we make our office work effectively? It's by design that we have a mix of Foreign Service, Civil Service, and political appointees, many of whom have worked in the private sector, because we want to have the institutional knowledge and expertise, and we want to have the outside perspective because we're focused on making improvements to the Department, strengthening it, being innovative."

Macmanus: "It really is wheels and cogs that need to fit together. The government as we have created it is run by a political class that is brought in by a nationally-elected President. The career service has a responsibility to engage that political class, like two gears. The cogs have got to fit together, but one and the other are always going to be different." ■





CA's outreach hub is accessible online and via mobile device browsers.
Courtesy of the Bureau of Consular Affairs

CA Launches Outreach Hub

The Bureau of Consular Affairs' Office of Policy Coordination and Public Affairs (CA/P) has launched a new Community@State website called the Consular Affairs Outreach Hub. The hub is a WordPress site providing tools and resources to support consular sections in traditional and digital engagement on consular issues. It highlights guidance, policies and best practices, and features ready-to-use content for conducting consular outreach.

The Hub's content includes tips for visa and American Citizens Services (ACS) outreach campaigns, cleared talking points for engaging with the press about ACS cases, guidance for consular crisis communications, considerations when making a video at post and best practices for using social media.

"The feedback we've received from both consular and public diplomacy officers has been great," says Amy Grier, outreach unit chief. "This site is clearly meeting a need at posts and is helping to bridge the gap between consular and public affairs knowledge."

CA/P developed the Hub based on information collected through email inquiries, consultations with overseas consular and public affairs officers, and input from Consular Leadership Development Conferences and presentations to FSI classes.

The CA Outreach [Hub](#) is being constantly updated, and CA welcomes questions, comments, suggestions and requests for new content and to highlight success stories and best practices from the field. Hub administrators can be reached at travelgov@state.gov or via the hub page online. ■





From left, Ambassador James Costos introduces Sergeant Joanne Archambault and Dr. Kim Lonsway, leaders of the American NGO End Violence Against Women International, to Spanish police at the U.S. Embassy in Madrid in November.

Photo by Embassy Madrid

NGO Visit Helps Post Respond to Rape Victims

When an overseas post's duty officer receives a call from an American woman who believes she was raped, the officer must speak with the victim constructively, and be aware that local police may not be as sensitive as Americans expect, which can reduce the victim's likelihood of reporting the crime.

To make the U.S. Embassy in Madrid more responsive in such cases, the post's American Citizens Services unit with help from the public affairs section, turned to the American NGO. End Violence Against Women International. The group, led by a retired police sergeant and a Ph.D. psychologist who works with victims of sexual assault, aids U.S. law enforcement in engaging with sexual assault victims to get them help and increase the likelihood of a successful prosecution.

ACS brought the NGO's experts to Spain as part of a campaign against gender violence.

In one session, 20 Spanish law enforcement officers learned best practices in interviewing rape victims and American techniques for increasing the likelihood of successful prosecution. Speakers stressed the need for law enforcement to start by expressing unconditional belief in a victim's story, allowing any rare deception to be uncovered in the subsequent investigation. (Skepticism can hurt victims' trust in law enforcement.)

The speakers then helped the mission's duty officers learn how to provide sensitive and effective assistance to callers victimized by sexual assault. For instance, they recommended always beginning with the question, "What are you most worried about right now?" to allow the victim to speak freely on any topic and not be pressured to address the crime. An attentive approach is more effective in leading victims to engage comfortably with police and caregivers later, when they may be more ready. The speakers then visited Barcelona to hold similar events with police and professionals in that district. ■





From left, Chiney Ogumike and retired NBA player Jason Collins join disabled athletes for a game of wheelchair basketball at the Associação Niteroiense dos Deficientes Físicos in Rio de Janeiro.

Photo by Lucia David

Slam Dunk for Diversity in Rio

Less than a year before Rio de Janeiro hosts the 2016 Summer Olympics and Paralympics, the U.S. Consulate General in Rio hosted two professional basketball players for a post-funded Sports Envoy program promoting diversity and social inclusion. WNBA forward Chiney Ogumike and retired NBA player Jason Collins used their October 2015 visit to advocate for persons with disabilities, women and girls, and LGBT individuals.

At basketball clinics and motivational talks, the players highlighted the many cultural values shared by Americans and Brazilians, including sports, community and diversity. They also visited with disabled athletes at a rehabilitation center, where they joined local sports enthusiasts for a game of wheelchair basketball.

Collins—the first openly gay professional athlete in a major American sports league—spoke about coming out as gay, aiming to open minds of audience members in a nation where discussion of sexual orientation is still a taboo for many. In some of Rio’s most disadvantaged communities he spoke about identity and social acceptance.

Ogumike, meanwhile, told attendees about the academic and professional challenges she has faced as a first-generation Nigerian-American and a female athlete from a conservative background. She encouraged participants to pursue their athletic and scholastic goals.

Consul General James Story said Mission Brazil’s Sports for All campaign “is the perfect way to build cross-cultural understanding through sports and promote tolerance and social inclusion.” The program built on the strong U.S.-Brazil relationship and highlighted both nations’ shared priorities surrounding diversity, human rights, security cooperation and people-to-people engagement. ■





Stacey Ferreira gathers with students at the Bangui Girls Vocational School.

Photo by Kristina Hayden

Exchanges Focus on Entrepreneurship

Embassy Bangui's public affairs section developed a comprehensive entrepreneurship program in support of Global Entrepreneurship Week in November 2015 by featuring young American entrepreneur Stacey Ferreira.

Ferreira, age 23 and working on her third business, is best known for MySocialCloud, her first endeavor, which she started at age 18 with backing from famed English businessman Richard Branson. At post, Ferreira brainstormed with Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) program alumni on coalition building, developing communities of interest and inspiring grassroots change. The results were the alumni members' formation of an alumni association and a commitment to Central African youths.

Ferreira also addressed the Girls Vocational School of Bangui in the first-ever visit by an American speaker to the campus. There she challenged the idea that young entrepreneurs must wait for investments before starting a business. Later, she discussed entrepreneurship with alumni of the International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP) and facilitated a meeting between IVLP alumni and students from the local Institute of Public Management, where she encouraged creation of a formal mentorship program. After the latter meeting, several IVLP alumni pulled aside students to exchange contact information and set up follow-on meetings. Ferreira also met with the embassy's English Club to discuss business plans and development, and the common challenges of entrepreneurs worldwide.

Embassy Bangui plans to host additional speaker programs during the spring of 2016. ■





Resilience—What Happened Between the Lines?

When you meet a seasoned senior Foreign Service officer, senior executive or experienced senior manager, you are most likely encountering someone who weathered a severe personal storm, lived through some adversity or navigated a number of obstacles. Contrary to popular belief, the path to the top isn't always easy, but those who are armed with resilience push through failure and roadblocks to reach success.

In the Office of Civil Rights (S/OCR), we see that workplace conflict can sometimes leave lasting feelings of disenfranchisement, distrust, self-doubt and anger. And even when there is a positive outcome or resolution, the negative repercussions may sometimes persist. So the central question is how to move on, whether from a career challenge, EEO-related incident, some random act of office treachery or our own self-inflicted mishaps?

The answer may lie in the findings arising from the series of panels I conducted with senior executives. In the panels, I presented this challenge: Your resumes are beautifully crafted documents detailing a string of seemingly easy successes, but what's really between the lines? What happened that nearly derailed your career or threw you off your path to success? Most participants cited subtle and not-so subtle undermining, peer treachery, blocks to upward mobility by bosses, jealous peers and sometimes detractors within their own families.

What was most striking were not the similarities in the respondents' adversities, but rather the similarities and consistencies about how they coped, survived and overcame these challenges. They often said the experience involved these factors:

- **Surprise.** Consistently, they had never encountered this kind of situation before, or on this scale, and found it unnerving how hurt and hostility had replaced trust. Some blamed themselves for not anticipating the problem, but all said it forced them out of their comfort zones and ultimately contributed to their professional growth.
- **Supporters.** Participants reported that they often did not receive help from those who promised to deliver; however, they received advice, relief, and comfort from the most unexpected places and people. To get help, they had to share information about their problem, pain or discomfort with others, which was at times difficult.
- **Paradigm Shift.** Participants had to look at something in their work or personal life differently than before—the performance appraisal system, job options, record keeping, planning, work-life balance, relationships and personal discipline. Many who were accustomed to independence now needed to ask for help.
- **Forgiveness.** Finally, nearly all participants said that, to move on, they needed to forgive someone. Sometimes it was their competitor(s) or the very individuals who stood in their way as obstacles. And for many, to truly recover, they had to forgive themselves.

For those of us on a leadership journey aided by mentors and advisors, I recommend asking your mentors and advisors for their personal stories of coping and recovery. What obstacles did they overcome on their path to success? You will likely find that stories of resilience offer more value than a recitation of easy victories, as it is in stories of resilience that the lessons worth learning often lie. By being open to sharing the challenges, failures and adversities hidden between the lines of our perfectly crafted resumes, we can each help to strengthen resilience in ourselves and in those facing difficult situations.

What obstacles have you had to overcome on your path to success? Send us your stories at diversity@state.gov. For advice on how to enhance resilience for personal and professional success, visit the Foreign Service Institute's community on "Fostering Resilience." ■

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John M. Robinson".

Direct from the D.G.

ARNOLD CHACON
DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE FOREIGN SERVICE



Lessons and Opportunities from Our Priority Staffing Posts

In the year-plus since I've been on the job, I've had the chance to visit our largest priority staffing posts (PSP)—those in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan. With the PSP bidding cycle beginning in June, I thought it would be timely to share some observations and encourage bidders to check out projected vacancies and consider serving in a PSP post. About 5 percent of Foreign Service employees and 13 Civil Service employees are currently serving at PSP posts. Overall, 59 percent of overseas employees are at hardship posts.

Service at PSP and hardship posts is increasingly the norm. Most Foreign Service employees will serve in one or more PSP posts at some point in their careers. The staffing needs are real, the work is substantive and challenging and the opportunities for professional growth are great. Service at PSP and hardship posts builds diplomats' resilience, leadership skills and ability to problem-solve—vital qualities and competencies needed to address the challenges of a fluid and complex world.

There are several reasons to serve at PSP posts. First, morale at PSP posts is high. Hardship and sacrifices notwithstanding, our people are highly motivated, driven and making an impact. They are committed to the mission and see firsthand how their work contributes to America's foreign policy objectives. This is partly a testament to good post leadership. But it's also true that employees are most engaged and productive when they feel they are doing meaningful work that is valued and recognized. PSP posts offer unique opportunities to do meaningful work that is crucial to the Department's mission and our nation's security, such as building democratic institutions and the rule of law or combatting ISIL and violent extremism.

A second reason is that the size and complexity of PSP posts provides opportunities for volunteering in the embassy community, mentorships and rotations through other sections. At PSP posts, mid-level officers have the chance to manage program budgets they could only dream of elsewhere and to stretch their leadership skills overseeing larger staffs. FSI courses, the Foreign Service Mentor program, best practices cables, webinars and other resources are critical enablers to developing these skills. Still, like little else, a challenging assignment empowers an employee to put these tools into practice and develop professionally.

A third reason is that the secretary's "mission first, people always" philosophy is the guiding principle at our best PSP posts. PSP posts are true microcosms of interagency teamwork. Mission success requires that all employees and all agencies work together smartly. It's not a "nice to have"; it's a "must have."

The Department can learn a lot from PSP posts, and we owe our people who serve there a debt of gratitude. Those employees who can do so should consider taking a PSP posting in their future. ■

Arnold A. Chacon



Century of Travel

New York agency celebrates milestone

By Janel A. Semper, customer service manager, New York Passport Agency

The New York Passport Agency, one of the busiest passport agencies in America, recently celebrated a century of issuing U.S. passports. In 1915, President Woodrow Wilson required passports of U.S. citizens traveling abroad. On Jan. 2, 1916, the New York office became the first Department of State passport agency to open.

In January, the agency celebrated its centennial by hosting congressional staffers, local elected officials and Department guests, including Under Secretary for Management Patrick F. Kennedy, Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs Michele T. Bond and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Passport Services Brenda S. Sprague.

“The agency has met the challenge of both unlocking the gate to global experiences for U.S. citizens and ensuring that only those entitled to passports obtain them,” Bond said.

Kennedy emphasized the agency’s service to the traveling public: “The agency fulfills the Department’s mission by supporting traveling Americans who help promote international understanding

of American values and policies.”

When the agency opened, most passports were only issued in Washington,

D.C., and then delivered to New York for distribution. Customers had to submit two passport applications, provide three photos and even specify the ships on which they were going to travel.

Since 1916, the agency has moved six times throughout the city, including to a location near Rockefeller Center. In the late 1990s, it moved to its current location in the Lower West Side. Situated in the largest city in the nation and close to three international airports, the agency assists more than 600 applicants daily at its public counters during the summer and holiday seasons.

The current increase in passport demand comes nearly a decade after the Department of Homeland Security began enforcing the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, which requires U.S. citizens to present passports and other approved documents to travel to and from Mexico, Canada, Bermuda and Caribbean countries.

“Last year, we issued nearly 15 million passports to U.S. citizens,

and this number will continue to increase over the next few years,” Sprague said. She noted that more than 38 percent of Americans have a valid U.S. passport, a percentage that doubled in a decade.

Over the last 100 years, U.S. passports have evolved in numerous ways, including changes in their color scheme, size, artwork and validity. Alexander Choy, a 30-year New York Passport Agency employee, recalls using messy glue pots to paste photos onto passports in the 1980s. Today, photos are digitized, which has simplified the application process and made it more secure.

As the New York Passport Agency prepares for its next century, the potential surge in demand for passports is being factored in. The agency has hired more employees and is encouraging local residents to plan ahead for international travel by applying for passports early. The agency also reminds customers to check their passports’ expiration date because some countries require them to be valid for at least six months beyond a traveler’s trip. ■



From left, Director of the New York Passport Agency Michael Hoffman; the former director of the New York Passport Agency, William Collins; Director of the Connecticut Passport Agency Jamiss E. Sebert; and Director of the Philadelphia Passport Agency Orlando L. Rivera celebrate the New York Passport Agency's 100th anniversary. Photo by Eduardo Nakano



From left, Under Secretary for Management Patrick F. Kennedy, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Passport Services Brenda Sprague, New York Passport Agency Director Michael Hoffman and Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs Michele T. Bond pose with the plaque recognizing the New York Passport Agency for service to traveling U.S. citizens.

Photo by Eduardo Nakano



100 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

of the New York Passport Agency

1916-2016





CONFRONTING TERROR

Embassy response to attack saves lives

By David Linfield, political officer, Embassy Bamako, Mali



Embassy response to attack saved lives

By David Linfield, political officer, Embassy Bamako, Mali

Beginning at 7:00 a.m. Nov. 20, Mali's capital experienced the worst terrorist attack in its history, but quick action and bravery saved American and others' lives by thwarting the plans of the assassins and sending a message that the United States will act decisively to confront terrorism.

The assault targeted the Radisson Hotel, where guests included our temporary facilities manager, John Hernandez. The calm of a normal 7:00 a.m. embassy shuttle pickup was shattered when heavily armed men began shooting at the hotel's security guards. "One terrorist looked straight into my eyes, raised his machine gun, and aimed. I shouted for my colleague and the driver to run," Hernandez said.

Bullets whizzed by and ricocheted around them, breaking marble and glass. A colleague fell behind him with a thud. Thinking his colleague was dead, Hernandez's training kicked in, compelling him to continue running into the hotel, trying to get to the roof in an adrenaline-fueled response to the attack.

Meanwhile, at 7:30 a.m., I was driving into the chancery's parking lot when I saw Assistant Regional Security Officer (ARSO) Ryan Pack jump out of a car. A Marine threw him a tactical bag, and Pack sped away. My carpool colleagues and I thought it odd, but reassured each other that it was probably just another in our series of frequent drills.

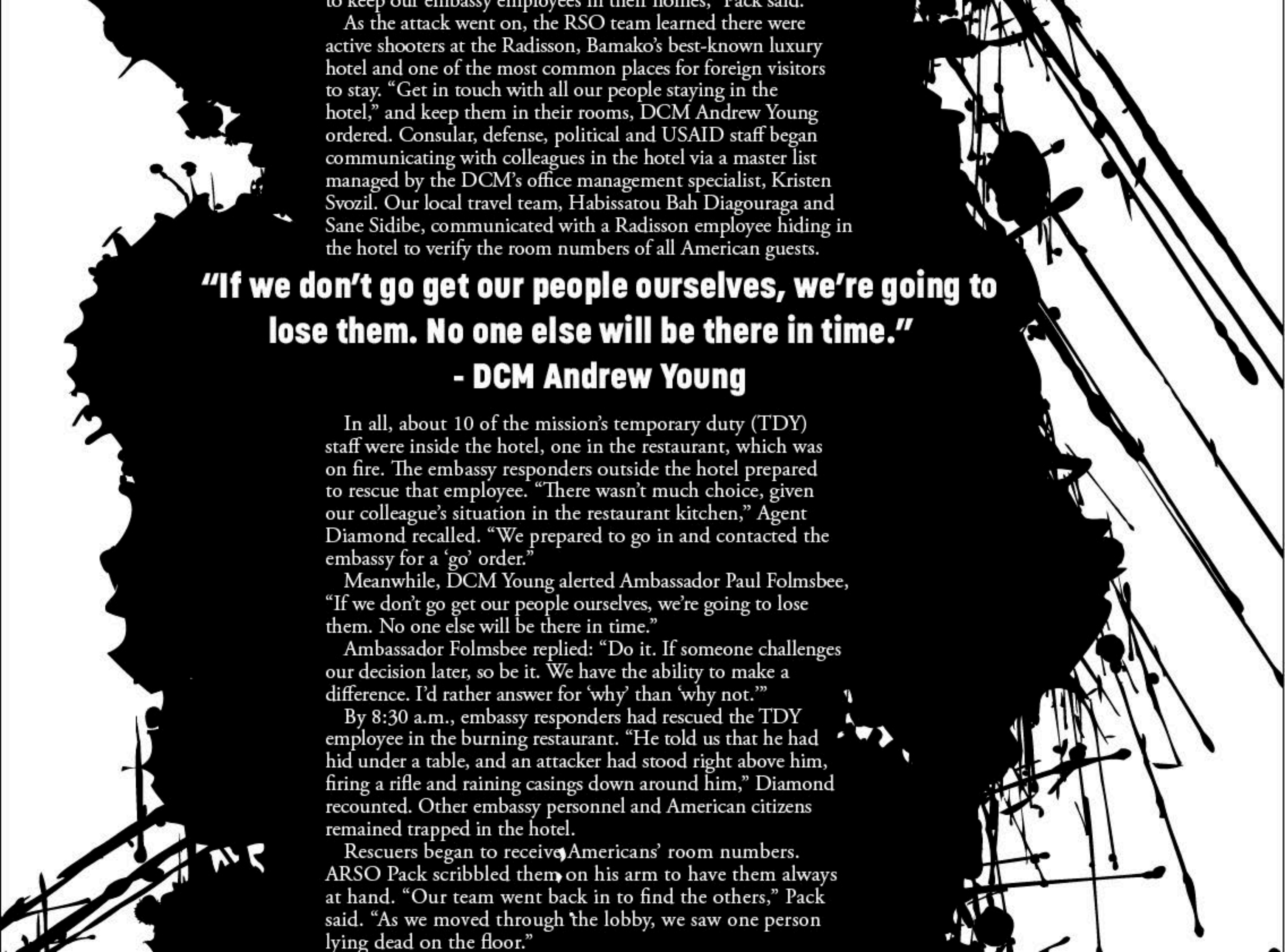
An urgent call from a colleague reported there was a situation near the Radisson. I then called a visiting political officer who was staying at the hotel, and warned him to stay in his room. The visitor stayed calm, which he credited after the attack to having received FACT training. I later learned he'd been about to go to the hotel's restaurant—and would have likely walked right into the jaws of the attack.

By 7:40 a.m. at the Radisson, ARSO Pack arrived to find his fellow Diplomatic Security special agent, Acting RSO Mike Diamond, was already there with some Defense Attaché office colleagues. "It was a chaotic scene and we didn't know exactly what was happening, so Diamond had ordered the local guards to keep our embassy employees in their homes," Pack said.

A Malian ambulance and Malian and international security forces wait at the Radisson's main entrance.

Photo by Habibou Kouyate





to keep our embassy employees in their homes," Pack said. As the attack went on, the RSO team learned there were active shooters at the Radisson, Bamako's best-known luxury hotel and one of the most common places for foreign visitors to stay. "Get in touch with all our people staying in the hotel," and keep them in their rooms, DCM Andrew Young ordered. Consular, defense, political and USAID staff began communicating with colleagues in the hotel via a master list managed by the DCM's office management specialist, Kristen Svozil. Our local travel team, Habissatou Bah Diagouraga and Sane Sidibe, communicated with a Radisson employee hiding in the hotel to verify the room numbers of all American guests.

"If we don't go get our people ourselves, we're going to lose them. No one else will be there in time."

- DCM Andrew Young

In all, about 10 of the mission's temporary duty (TDY) staff were inside the hotel, one in the restaurant, which was on fire. The embassy responders outside the hotel prepared to rescue that employee. "There wasn't much choice, given our colleague's situation in the restaurant kitchen," Agent Diamond recalled. "We prepared to go in and contacted the embassy for a 'go' order."

Meanwhile, DCM Young alerted Ambassador Paul Folmsbee, "If we don't go get our people ourselves, we're going to lose them. No one else will be there in time."

Ambassador Folmsbee replied: "Do it. If someone challenges our decision later, so be it. We have the ability to make a difference. I'd rather answer for 'why' than 'why not.'"

By 8:30 a.m., embassy responders had rescued the TDY employee in the burning restaurant. "He told us that he had hid under a table, and an attacker had stood right above him, firing a rifle and raining casings down around him," Diamond recounted. Other embassy personnel and American citizens remained trapped in the hotel.

Rescuers began to receive Americans' room numbers. ARSO Pack scribbled them on his arm to have them always at hand. "Our team went back in to find the others," Pack said. "As we moved through the lobby, we saw one person lying dead on the floor."

In his hotel room, the political section's TDY employee had heard the fire alarm and wondered whether to try to get out of the building. But I called again and said to stay put, informing the employee that multiple active shooters were believed to be roaming the hotel. "Lock your door, block it quietly with furniture if you can, then get away from the door and windows and stay quiet," I said.

As soon as he hung up, an explosion boomed, then gunshots.



Malian security forces gather in the Radisson's main lobby.

Photo by Habibou Kouyate

Meanwhile, USAID Deputy Health Director Bijou Muhura called the only one of the three public health contractors at the Radisson with a working phone. She told her to stay in her room and keep calm. Then Muhura scrambled to contact the other two contractors using any means available, including their Skype and Facebook accounts. She shared their information with embassy responders so they could look for them in the hotel.

By 8:50 a.m., Office Management Specialist Svozil had contacted half of those on her list of embassy personnel in the Radisson and was circulating updates on their status and location. "Over the next few hours, I was slowly able to change the status of name after name on my spreadsheet to 'extracted,'" she recalled.

Svozil also noticed media reports claiming the attackers had arrived at the hotel in a diplomatic vehicle, but she recalled that an embassy driver had gone to pick up the hotel's TDY staff. She quickly confirmed that the media had mistakenly linked the embassy's car to the attack and then alerted the public affairs section, which advised the media.

At about 9:30 a.m., I learned embassy responders were going to rescue the TDY staff members who remained trapped, so I called my contact at the hotel. The hotel guest said there had been a knock at his door.

"Do not open your door," I warned. "Our people aren't there yet."

The knock could have been a terrorist trying to lure out the guest. A European guest had been shot dead after opening his door to a similar knock.

Because of this, I asked the DCM to come up with a signal, such as a special knock, that responders could use to tell those being rescued it was safe to open their doors. All the security personnel were busy at the hotel so the DCM came up with a signal on the spot. Others and I then called our trapped colleagues to tell them what it was.

Meanwhile at the hotel, in the stairwell between the fourth and fifth floors, rifle fire rained down on our response team from the landing above. The rescuers returned fire, but the assailant was better positioned. Then he dropped a grenade, and they took cover.

The responders decided to split up. Two went down to inform the Malian, French and U.N. (MINUSMA) security forces waiting outside that they had located the terrorists. The rest kept the assailants pinned down until local forces could come and take over.

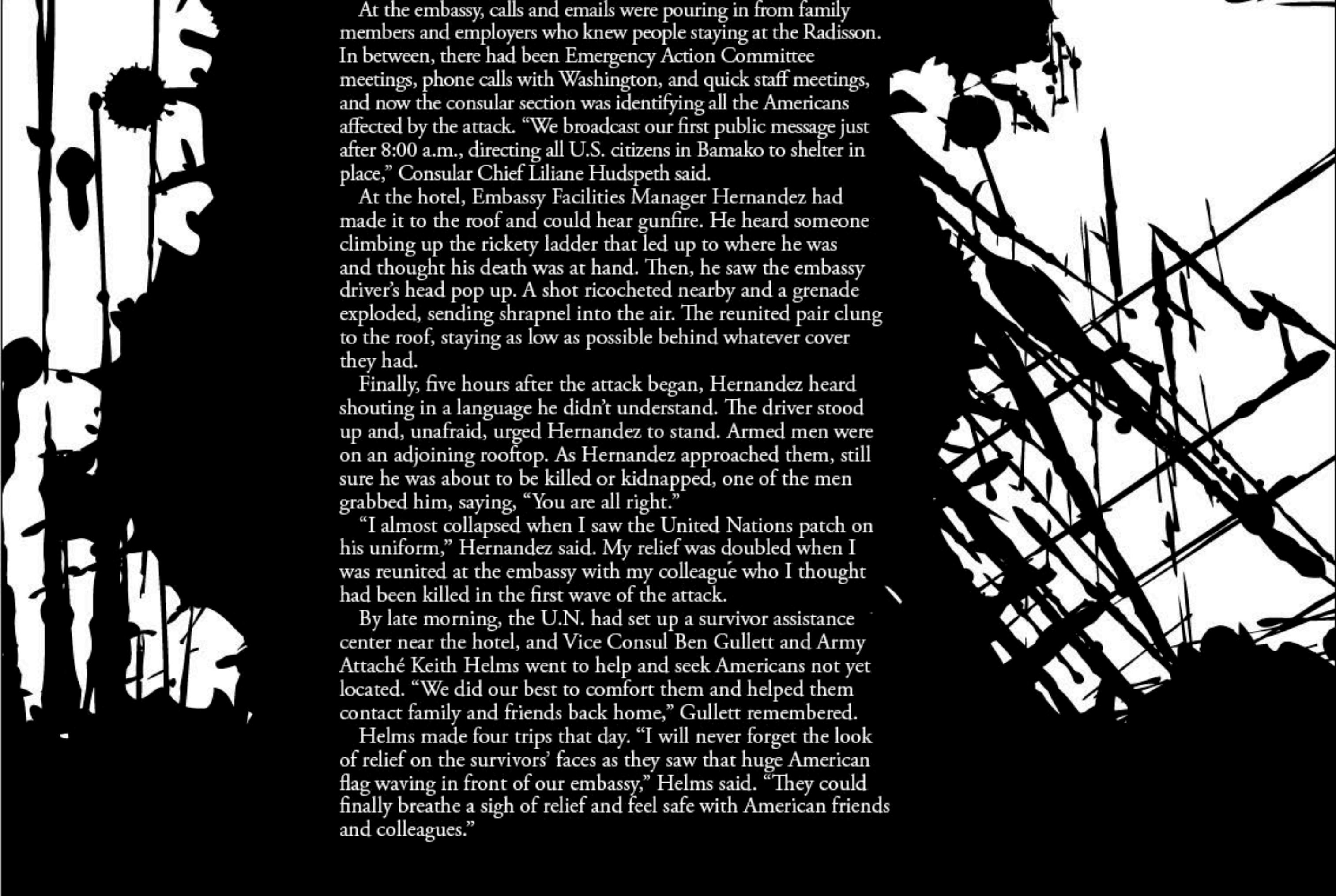


A MINUSMA forensics tech photographs one of the attacker's rifles.

Photo courtesy of MINUSMA

Meanwhile, still in his hotel room, the political TDY employee had looked through his door's peephole and seen a man dressed all in black, carrying a rifle. He had no idea if the man was a security officer or a terrorist, and he didn't look out again—until he heard the signal knock on the door, at around 11:00 a.m.

"I rushed to get rid of the furniture I had piled up in front of the door, and then it burst open," he recalled. "I was relieved when I recognized one DS agent by his distinctive hair, which I'd noticed around the embassy that week."



At the embassy, calls and emails were pouring in from family members and employers who knew people staying at the Radisson. In between, there had been Emergency Action Committee meetings, phone calls with Washington, and quick staff meetings, and now the consular section was identifying all the Americans affected by the attack. "We broadcast our first public message just after 8:00 a.m., directing all U.S. citizens in Bamako to shelter in place," Consular Chief Liliane Hudspeth said.

At the hotel, Embassy Facilities Manager Hernandez had made it to the roof and could hear gunfire. He heard someone climbing up the rickety ladder that led up to where he was and thought his death was at hand. Then, he saw the embassy driver's head pop up. A shot ricocheted nearby and a grenade exploded, sending shrapnel into the air. The reunited pair clung to the roof, staying as low as possible behind whatever cover they had.

Finally, five hours after the attack began, Hernandez heard shouting in a language he didn't understand. The driver stood up and, unafraid, urged Hernandez to stand. Armed men were on an adjoining rooftop. As Hernandez approached them, still sure he was about to be killed or kidnapped, one of the men grabbed him, saying, "You are all right."

"I almost collapsed when I saw the United Nations patch on his uniform," Hernandez said. My relief was doubled when I was reunited at the embassy with my colleague who I thought had been killed in the first wave of the attack.

By late morning, the U.N. had set up a survivor assistance center near the hotel, and Vice Consul Ben Gullett and Army Attaché Keith Helms went to help and seek Americans not yet located. "We did our best to comfort them and helped them contact family and friends back home," Gullett remembered.

Helms made four trips that day. "I will never forget the look of relief on the survivors' faces as they saw that huge American flag waving in front of our embassy," Helms said. "They could finally breathe a sigh of relief and feel safe with American friends and colleagues."




A MINUSMA security officer points out bullet holes left during the attack.

Photo courtesy of MINUSMA

Deputy Health Director Muhura learned in the early afternoon that U.N. forces had rescued the second of the three public health contractors. Muhura's momentary relief was overshadowed by her fear of why they had not yet been able to find the third.

At the embassy, I had spent the morning on and off the phone, checking on who had escaped, who had been rescued, and who was still unaccounted for. Now, some callers from the hotel were increasingly nervous. One caller said he thought the terrorists were about to reach his room, as they worked their way down the hall. I told him to barricade the door, stand away from it, and prepare to fight if all else failed. Then, we had to hang up so the terrorists wouldn't hear him."



A full 28 minutes later, the TDY employee texted: "I'm out." Malian and international forces had reached the upper floors of the hotel.

When the rescue ended, all Americans at the hotel were accounted for, except one of the three health contractors. Anita Datar had come to Mali to work on a USAID health project. A resident of Takoma Park, Md., and a returned Peace Corps Volunteer, she had a child and had devoted her life to international development. Her two colleagues from the Palladium international development company were now at the embassy and very worried. That night, the RSO team and USAID reported possibly finding a body at the morgue, later confirmed as Datar. Ambassador Folmsbee then notified Datar's family himself.

When the smoke had cleared, 20 people from seven countries had been killed, including one American. However, more than 100 lives had been saved thanks to the swift, brave action of multinational security forces and the extensive team that supported them. Those rescued thanked the U.S. and France, as well as U.N. peacekeepers and Malian security forces. We mourn the lives lost and are grateful for how the embassy community came together decisively to prevent an even greater tragedy. ■





Post of the Month

JERUSALEM

Consulate General bridges cultural divides in the Holy Land



Post of the Month

Opening video: Tourists float in the hypersaline waters of the Dead Sea.

Story and photos by Isaac D. Pacheco

Jerusalem, an ancient Middle Eastern city with historical ties to several of the world’s most widely practiced religions, is today one of the most frequently visited loca sancta for pilgrims from all corners of the earth. The most ancient of Jerusalem’s numerous enclaves is the Old City, where human settlements existed as early as the 4th century BCE.

The Old City’s four quarters (Jewish, Christian, Armenian and Muslim) each reflect the dominant religious or ethnographic population residing within them. They contain holy shrines that Jews, Christians, and Muslims revere, including the Dome of the Rock, al-Aqsa Mosque, the Via Dolorosa, the Western Wall, and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

War and conquest have shaped the region throughout history, but Jerusalem remains a phoenix of sorts, having literally risen from rubble several times over the centuries after being attacked, sacked and destroyed. In recent times, disagreements between Israelis and Palestinians over the city’s sovereignty have frequently led to violent confrontations and a seemingly intractable cycle of conflict.

“This is the city that Israelis consider their capital, and yet the United States and other countries still regard it as a political issue yet to be resolved,” said Michael A. Ratney, former consul general at the U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem. “It’s a city that the Palestinians would like one day to consider their capital, but that is still the subject of negotiations, which have yet to bear fruit.”

The lack of progress over the years toward a mutually agreeable resolution between Palestinians and Israelis casts a pall over the region; yet, as one of the world’s living museums and richest





Young women pose for a selfie near the entrance to the Dome of the Rock in the Old City.

[Tap here to see full Image](#)

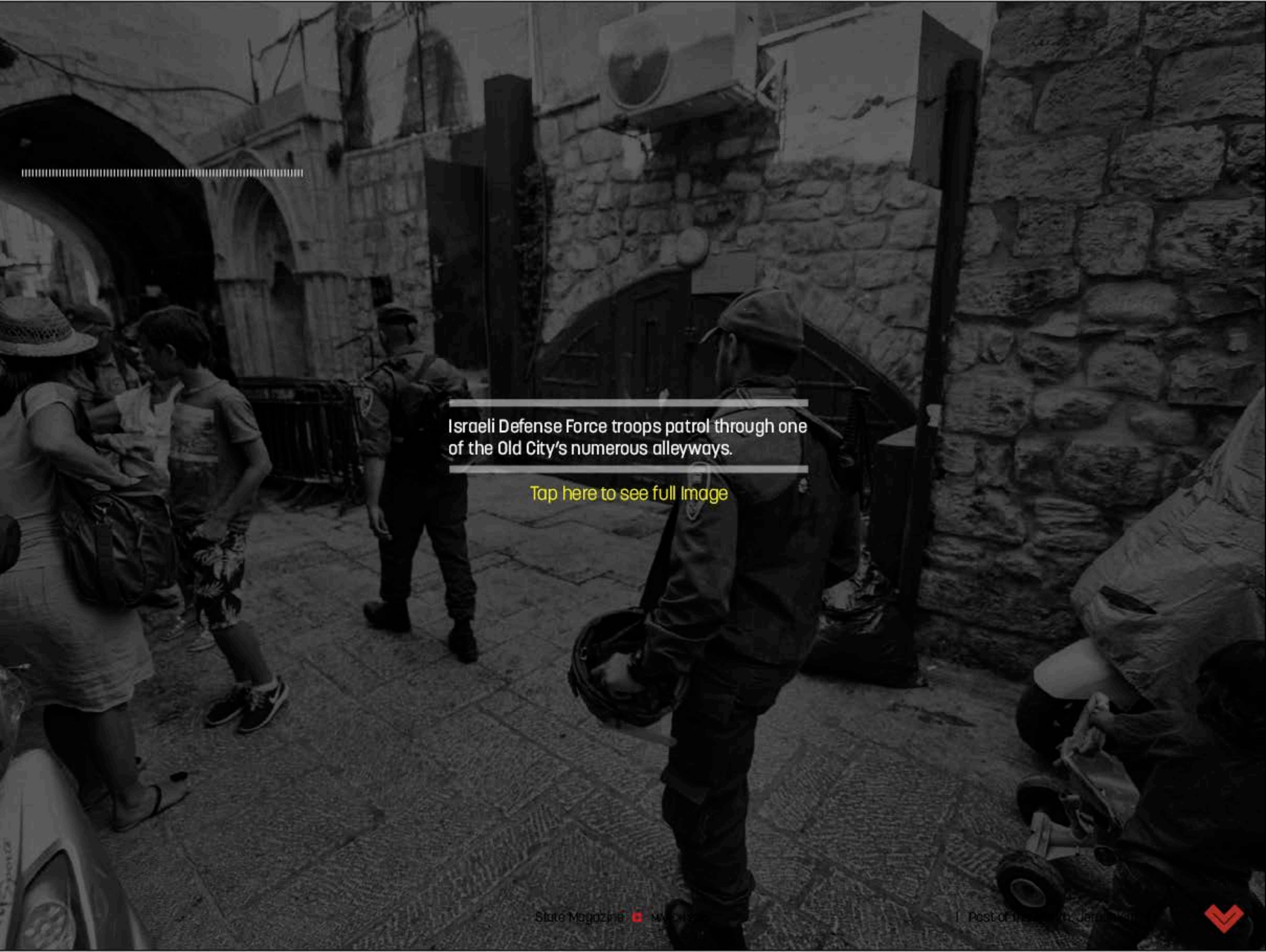




Pilgrims wait their turn to pray at an altar believed to rest over Calvary in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

[Tap here to see full image](#)





|||||

Israeli Defense Force troops patrol through one of the Old City's numerous alleyways.

[Tap here to see full Image](#)



A Palestinian woman passes through an Israeli Defense Force checkpoint in Hebron, the West Bank's largest city.

Tap here to see full Image



Consulate officials tackle this daunting task by working closely with East Jerusalem institutions and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank to develop a sustainable economic model and strong civil society, crucial elements for a Palestinian state. The consulate has also promoted a “change from

|||



within” approach by stressing equality and respect among its diverse and talented locally employed (LE) staff community. In the process, the post has become a microcosm of the types of cross-cultural collaboration it seeks to see spread throughout its district.

“What makes working here different from any other place in Jerusalem is that your career is not connected with your religion or your nationality,” said Raymond Saleh, LE program management specialist. “Internal policies and procedures are equal for everyone. There is no bias or discrimination against any culture or ethnic group or religion; we’re all treated the same. Muslims, Jews, Christians, we’re all together—we’re friends. Palestinians and Israelis are friends working here together, and that’s what makes the place such a good environment to work in.”

Security and safety issues related to regional conflict can take a mental toll on employees in Jerusalem, which is why post leadership encourages internal teambuilding and resilience programs. The community liaison office (CLO) contributes to these efforts through community events that provide officers and staff members with opportunities to interact in a safe, open environment.



Post of the Month

Girls participate in an art class craft project during an English language summer camp in Ramallah.

[Tap here to see full Image](#)



Post of the Month

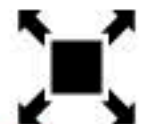
“Relationships matter, so when you come to work and you know somebody [who] is Jewish or Muslim or Christian and you become colleagues, you connect with them on an individual level regardless of their religion. It makes it personal,” said Jacqui Grawburg, CLO coordinator. “Locals can come here and escape from the tensions out there.”

Given the entrenched (and often contrasting) perspectives of Israelis and Palestinians, particularly on such contentious issues as Israeli settlements in the West Bank, consulate leaders face several logistical and diplomatic challenges when communicating with stakeholders. The politically charged nature of these issues also leads to constant public attention to every decision the consulate team makes.

“You have Israelis and Palestinians all watching what we’re doing. The U.S. Congress, Americans, all these people elsewhere who care so much about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they watch what we do,” said Ratney. “As a diplomatic mission, I feel like we’re under a microscope more than certainly anywhere else I’ve ever worked.”

As the face of the United States to the general public, the post’s consular affairs section is used to intense scrutiny. Located at a modern annex building in Jerusalem’s Arnona neighborhood, the consular team provides services to the region’s very diverse community, issuing more than 20,000 nonimmigrant visas and 4,000 immigrant visas each year. Also, with approximately 250,000 Americans in their consular district on any given day (many of them dual nationals), the consular section handles one of the most intense ACS workloads in the world.

“We serve Israelis, Jews, Palestinians and Arabs across our area of responsibility: Gaza, West Bank, and



TAP Image
to Enlarge





Post of the Month

Residents travel on Jerusalem's modern tram system near the Old City.

[Tap here to see full image](#)

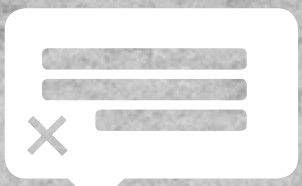




A diverse group of residents sit in the Consul-
ar section waiting room.

[Tap here to see full image](#)





A man leads a group of Jewish children in prayer at the Western Wall.



Jerusalem. It presents a lot of challenges,” said Aaron Hellman, consular section chief. “We are prohibited from going to Gaza, so we can’t actually be on the ground there. The authority there is Hamas, which is a designated foreign terrorist organization. We can’t interact with them to provide services. Meeting the needs of Americans citizens there, whether in a crisis situation necessitating an evacuation or merely to provide routine consular services, becomes very challenging.”

Finding creative ways to communicate with an audience that is sometimes physically inaccessible is the main challenge for of the post’s public affairs office, which not only engages audiences through traditional arts and the cultural outreach channels, but also through entrepreneurship, social media and the largest English language-learning program in the world.

“We’ve done a lot to build a community on Facebook and Twitter, and it’s a community of people that don’t just necessarily like the United States, but people who are interested in foreign policy, and have a lot to say about it,” said Buangan. “It’s not just about

An IDF soldier and her friend order smoothies at a streetside stand in Jerusalem.





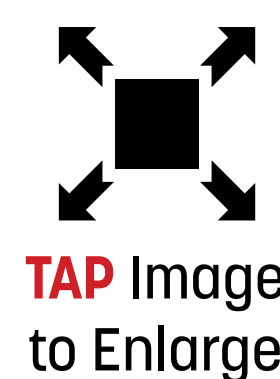
An IDF soldier stands sentry at a police checkpoint outside Hebron in the West Bank.

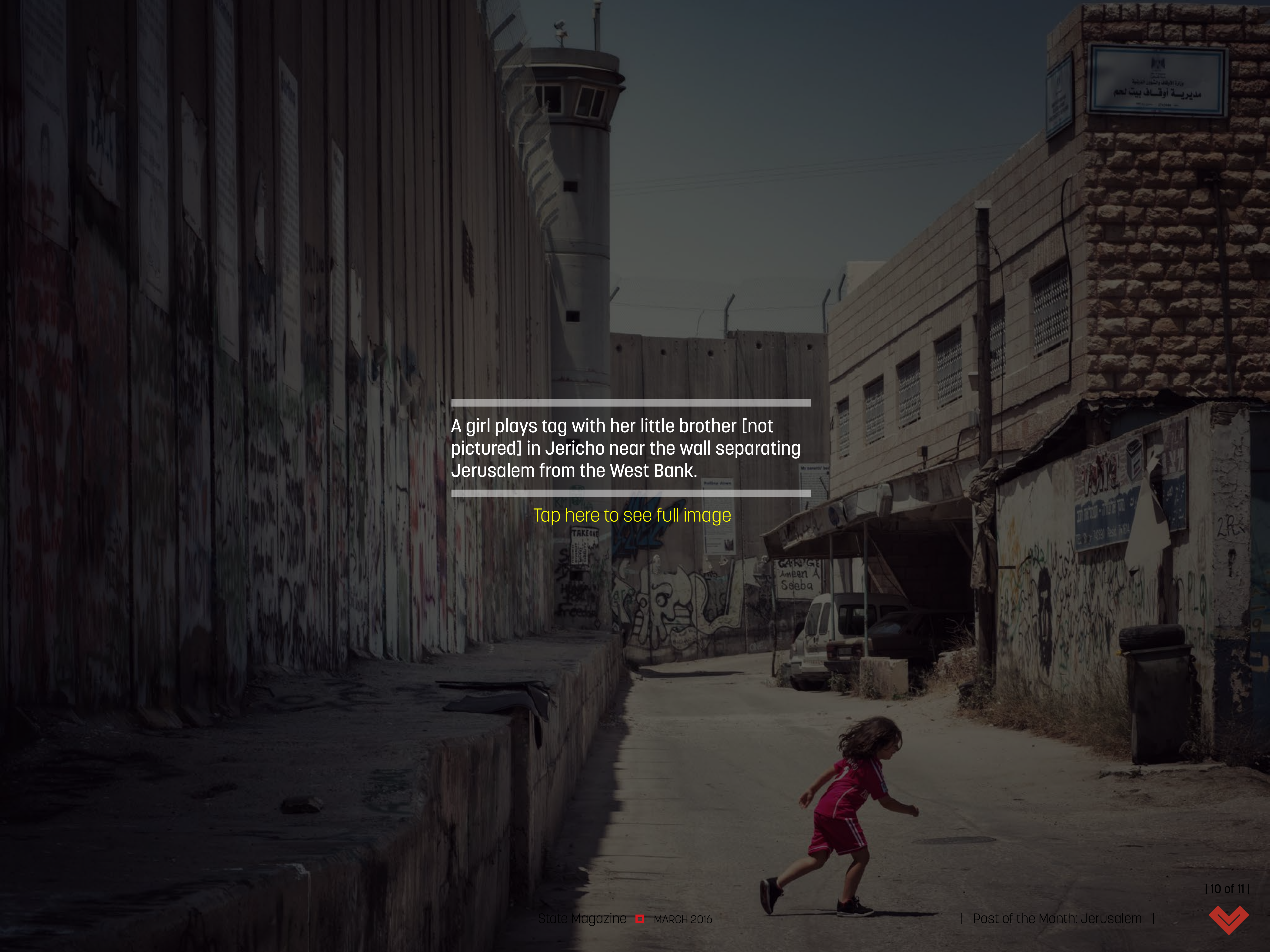


finding people who agree with us, it's about creating bridges of trust with people who have different and divergent views on American foreign policy. We make it a point to really foster a conversational environment so people can talk freely and give their opinions and know that whatever they offer, whether they agree or disagree with U.S. foreign policy, their comments are safe, and their comments are respected.”

A major theme that has arisen during ConGen Jerusalem's conversations with the public is the desire for positive change—for signs of progress toward a peaceful resolution to the conflicts that continue to divide the region. Consulate officials acknowledge that they can't always answer the big question about a two-state solution that would provide all parties with the security, dignity and stability they desire. Instead, they look for concrete, measurable solutions to manageable issues that can lead to improved quality of life for Palestinians in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza today.

“If we didn't believe that there's an ultimate goal and objective out there that's worth accomplishing, we wouldn't be working so hard on it, said Dan Cronin, regional security officer. “The talented individuals working at this mission understand that. They understand that it's hard, and take the assignment because they want to be part of the process.” ■





A girl plays tag with her little brother [not pictured] in Jericho near the wall separating Jerusalem from the West Bank.

[Tap here to see full image](#)





▲ PLEASE SCROLL TO VIEW ENTIRE MAP ▼



Liked by Millions

ECA Facebook community hits record

By Heidi Howland, senior program officer and social media manager, ECA Office of English Language Programs

English language ability improves economic opportunities in all career fields, and professionals who communicate in English can collaborate with partners worldwide and better succeed in the interconnected economy. To support the expanding networked community of English-language learners, the Office of English Language Programs in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) designs and manages programs to promote language learning and supports English teaching worldwide.

The office's American English website, launched in 2012, merges five Facebook pages into one, providing a resource for U.S. Embassies. The American English page has become a virtual community of English-language learners and teachers worldwide, with followers improving their English skills, exploring different cultures, sharing ideas and exchanging views. Many users in low-bandwidth areas access it via mobile devices.

This community has expanded in 15 months from 400,000 followers to more than 2 million. The office, when the total reached 1 million in March 2015, asked followers, "Why is English important to you?" The large number of responses caused the office to create a photo campaign that's now an animated video collage.

When it reached 2 million likes, the page challenged followers to create short video clips documenting the travels of an American English paper airplane around the world. That's now a [film](#).

With the growth, the office has come to understand how a large, on-line learning community can communicate, share ideas, take chances, make mistakes, teach and learn.

Followers are also excited. One, Vishnu Pratap Singh of India, said he has followed "many national and international pages teaching English. But I haven't seen any of them...replying to almost all individual comments the way you do."

Suggestions to expand your office's social media community:

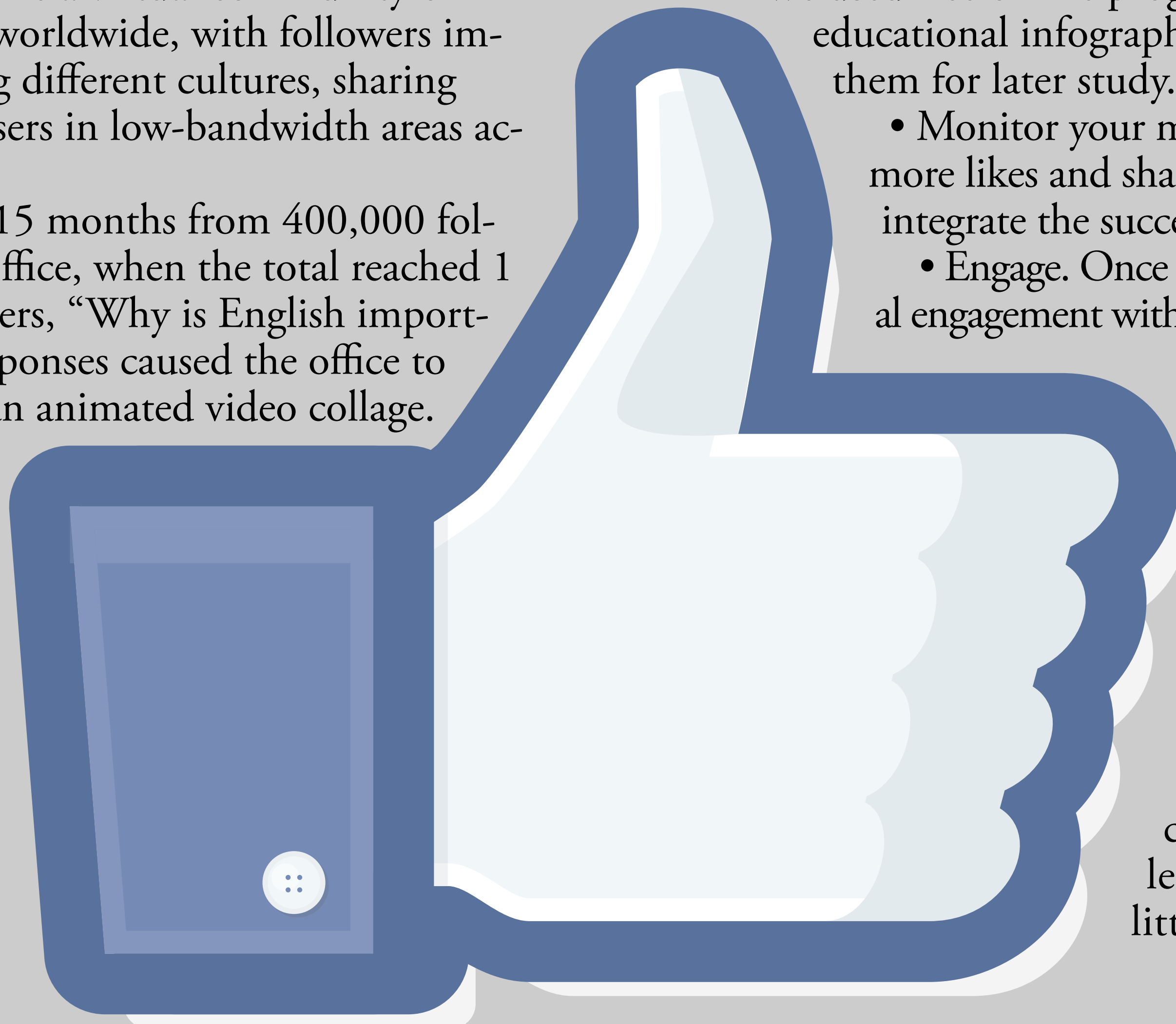
- Listen to your audience, and learn how to make your page more effective. Our office often asked the audience what it wanted to learn.
- Use custom infographics. You don't need graphic design training to create infographics that, like ours, receive thousands of likes and shares.

We used free online programs like Piktochart and Canva to make educational infographics that resonated. Many followers saved them for later study.

- Monitor your metrics daily, identifying which posts get more likes and shares, to determine the reasons. Then, try to integrate the successful elements into other posts.
- Engage. Once you post, you're not done; you need continual engagement with your followers to let them know their comments are being seen, read and responded to.

(I spend about 20 hours per week creating content for and actively monitoring and posting to the page.)

• Encourage Fans' Connections. People are invested in their learning and in the learning of others. As one English-language learner told us, "I rarely get a chance to connect to others in English because of the war in our country, Syria. I hope everyone would learn English to make the whole globe a little village." ■



SKYPE NIGHT

Indonesian teens chat with friends from home

By Holly Zardus, assistant cultural affairs officer, U.S. Embassy in Jakarta



In the middle of the night one year ago this month, three Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) participants from Indonesia connected via Skype from their host families' homes in Washington, Wisconsin and Maryland to a group of Indonesian high school students at the American Cultural Center, @america, in Jakarta. Just nine months prior, the girls had been uniform-wearing members of the same school.

Bubbling with excitement, the questions keep coming: Hello! How are you? Have you eaten yet? [laughter] What about evening prayers? Have you prayed? [more laughter] Tell us about your daily life while you are a student in America.

Nearly 100 students at @america, plus more joining via digital video conference from the Consulate General in Medan, sat with rapt attention as their friends reached out from halfway around the world confirming that they were, in fact, doing fine, living in American homes and attending high school every day—a proposition so unlikely only seeing and hearing from them on Skype would they believe it.

The girls described how students in America regularly ask them questions like why they wear the scarf-like head covering called the hijab, and even “Do you have hair?”

“I told her she could touch it if she wanted to,” one of the YES youths recalled.

Last year more than 9,000 Indonesians, aged 15–17, applied for the embassy's 85 available YES exchange slots, competition that is keener than that for some Ivy League colleges. A year prior to departure, applicants fill out the 10-page application documenting their activities, achievements and involvement with the community outside of school. They then proceed through three rounds of interviews and group activities, finally reaching the national selection interview in Jakarta.

Most applicants have never experienced a truly merit-based application process. Some from far-flung corners of Indonesia may never have thought about what constitutes their achievements or how they've been serving their communities, let alone described them in an English-language interview, possibly with an American. Multiple selection rounds prepare those who

will ultimately travel to the United States and cull those who will not. Even those not chosen learn to speak about themselves honestly, humbly and passionately, making the mere selection process life-altering.

In the United States, they live with host families and attend high schools in all 50 states, in big cities and small towns, equipped with a strong sense of self, curious minds, a battery of talents and ready to represent Indonesia in America. They are ready to speak thoughtfully and help acquaintances know more about their sprawling island nation that remains largely unknown to ordinary Americans.



The @america digital video conference involved 15 YES exchange students, including Ayunda Nisa Chaira, Wiwin Hartini and Livia Ellen.

Photos by Putra Aditya



After a year, the conversations and relationships go much deeper than these surface-level exchanges of ideas. When asked at @america about adapting to life in the United States, one YES student spoke of learning of Americans' freedom of religion and speech and "to think what you want... They respect us and our religion," the student said.

Said another, "Students in the U.S. have a lot of opinions, and they put them forward. We often have discussions and then, if we don't agree, we say, 'That is different from me, but it's OK to discuss it.'" She continued, "As a Muslim in the U.S., so many people have asked me about Islam and Muslim life. That has been a great way for them to get to know more about us. They are very respectful."

Ambassador to Indonesia Robert O. Blake calls YES "one of our most transformational exchange programs because of the quality of the

program and the depth of the relationships that are formed, on both sides." He lauds how participants "gain an in-depth understanding of America that will make them strong supporters of building ties between the U.S. and Indonesia, in whatever field they choose to pursue."

These experiences lay bare true understanding of the principles behind American values and behavior, as well as immersion in day-to-day aspects of American life—respect for the rule of law and human rights, frequent volunteering, and exposure to an open and pluralistic society. Not only will these students return to Indonesia able to dispel misunderstandings and myths about the United States, but will serve as the future leaders in their schools, communities and the country. "Youth exchange programs like YES are not merely beneficial to our long-term relationship with Indonesia, but fundamental to it," said Blake. ■



Ambassador Blake, at rear in suit, hosts the 2015-2016 YES send-off reception at his residence.

Photo by Erik Kurniawan



FRESH IDEAS

Nontraditional partnering boosts programs

By John Heffern, PDAS, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs

As a former DCM at Embassy Jakarta and chief of mission at Embassy Yerevan, I have seen public-private partnerships deepen an embassy's impact, increase outreach and advance U.S. policy. Specifically, I have seen benefits in non-traditional partnerships and in working with partners in non-traditional ways. The key to making these partnerships work is having a creative, collaborative country team and talented, committed local staff.

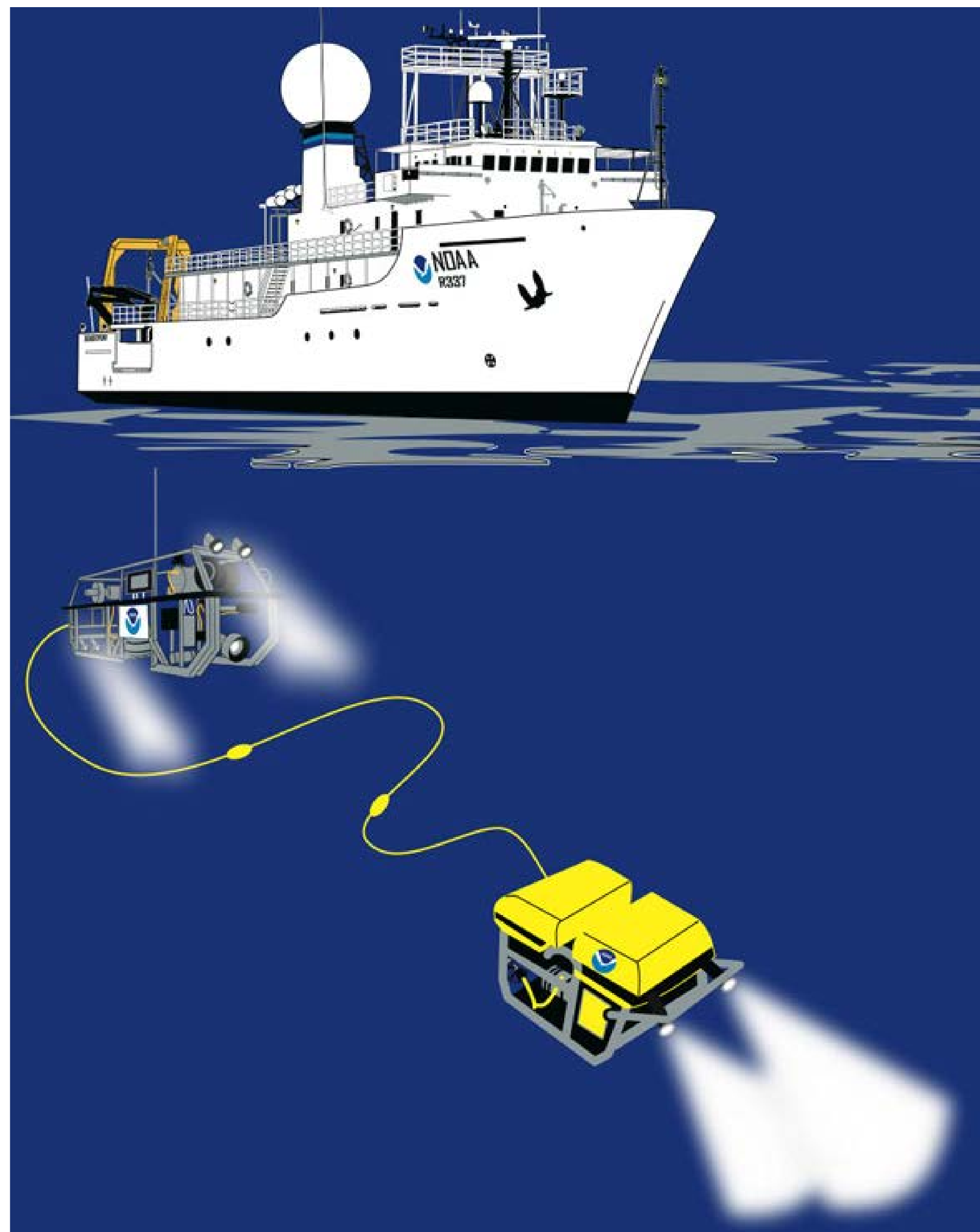
With decreasing foreign assistance and exchange budgets, posts need creative ways to boost their resources and impact through partnering, as was recently done by the USAID team in Armenia. Its innovative initiative with the Smithsonian Institution (SI) brings together diaspora groups, hotels, universities and the World Bank to advance our rural development goals, including by introducing sustainable tourism to Armenia's archeological sites. According to SI, this partnership will "leverage USAID funding in the tourism sector with contributions from private investment to support cultural sector growth through rigorous, community-based scholarship."

That initiative arose because American employees at Embassy Yerevan were exploring Armenia's archeological

treasures just as USAID had announced a global memorandum of understanding with SI. USAID Yerevan was the first mission to jump at this opportunity, seeking a partnership on cultural tourism that will transform key sectors of the Armenian economy and maybe even the bilateral relationship.

The Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, meanwhile, is encouraging posts to move beyond their usual contacts. Despite declining travel and rep funds, posts can partner with U.S.-based social entrepreneurship groups, such as Ashoka, Echoing Green and the newer Global Good Fund, to seek out like-minded individuals and organizations in-country, especially in rural areas. These groups have incredible reach in many countries all over the world to rural change-makers; they share our values and do work that advances U.S. goals, but are often unknown to U.S. Embassies. Embassies Yerevan, Vilnius, Vienna and Warsaw are all exploring informal partnerships to share information and develop contacts with these U.S.-based social entrepreneurship organizations.





In an illustration, the NOAA ship *Okeanos Explorer* tows the camera sled *Seirios*, as the remote-operated underwater vehicle (ROV) *Little Hercules* travels below.

Image courtesy of NOAA

U.S. Embassies may overlook these organizations because they are not “our partners” (i.e., not U.S. government-funded). However, social entrepreneurship, crowdfunding and micro-finance organizations offer great opportunities for non-traditional partnership.

In the advancement of policy as well, these partnerships can be effective. Reliance on traditional techniques, such as demarches, legislation and international conventions, is not enough. Nontraditional methods like crowd-funding and micro-finance are also needed. According to Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn in their study, *Half the Sky*, “Micro-finance has done more to bolster the status of women in developing countries, and to protect them from abuse, than any laws could accomplish.” Their study also notes the importance of partnerships between governments, NGOs and the private sector to spread international values.

While serving at Embassies Jakarta and Yerevan, I saw nontraditional partnerships in action. At Embassy Jakarta, the environmental team worked with NOAA to bring the research vessel *Okeanos Explorer* to Indonesia. This initiative responded to threats to Indonesia’s great marine biodiversity from villagers who use dynamite to fish, thus destroying fish stocks and coral reefs. This underwater, remote-controlled submersible showed Indonesia the wonders of its underwater resources and raised the environmental consciousness of millions of Indonesians, thereby effectively supplementing our demarches and diplomatic prodding on the issue of dynamite fishing.

In Yerevan, the partnership involved a popular singer. The cultural affairs section leveraged its relationship with this celebrity to convince him to renounce publicly, and apologize for, inappropriate comments he had made about an LGBT competitor. The embassy then included this celebrity in its “Happy Yerevan” performance (365,000 views on YouTube). He in turn demonstrated his new attitude by becoming an active human rights campaigner,



performing benefits for women's groups and participating in public service announcements against domestic violence. The partnership involved close coordination between the political and public diplomacy sections and helped transform this celebrity from a symbol of intolerance to a spokesperson for women's rights and empowerment—values that missions worldwide promote.

Two social media tools, crowdfunding and Twitter, are also good for developing nontraditional partnerships. For instance, Embassy Yerevan's public affairs section refers like-minded organizations with good ideas and worthy goals to crowdfunding platforms active in that country. For example, the American University of Armenia's Center for Responsible Mining raised \$32,000 via the crowdfunding sites Indiegogo and ONEArmenia; it will use the money to purchase testing equipment for mining sites. Center



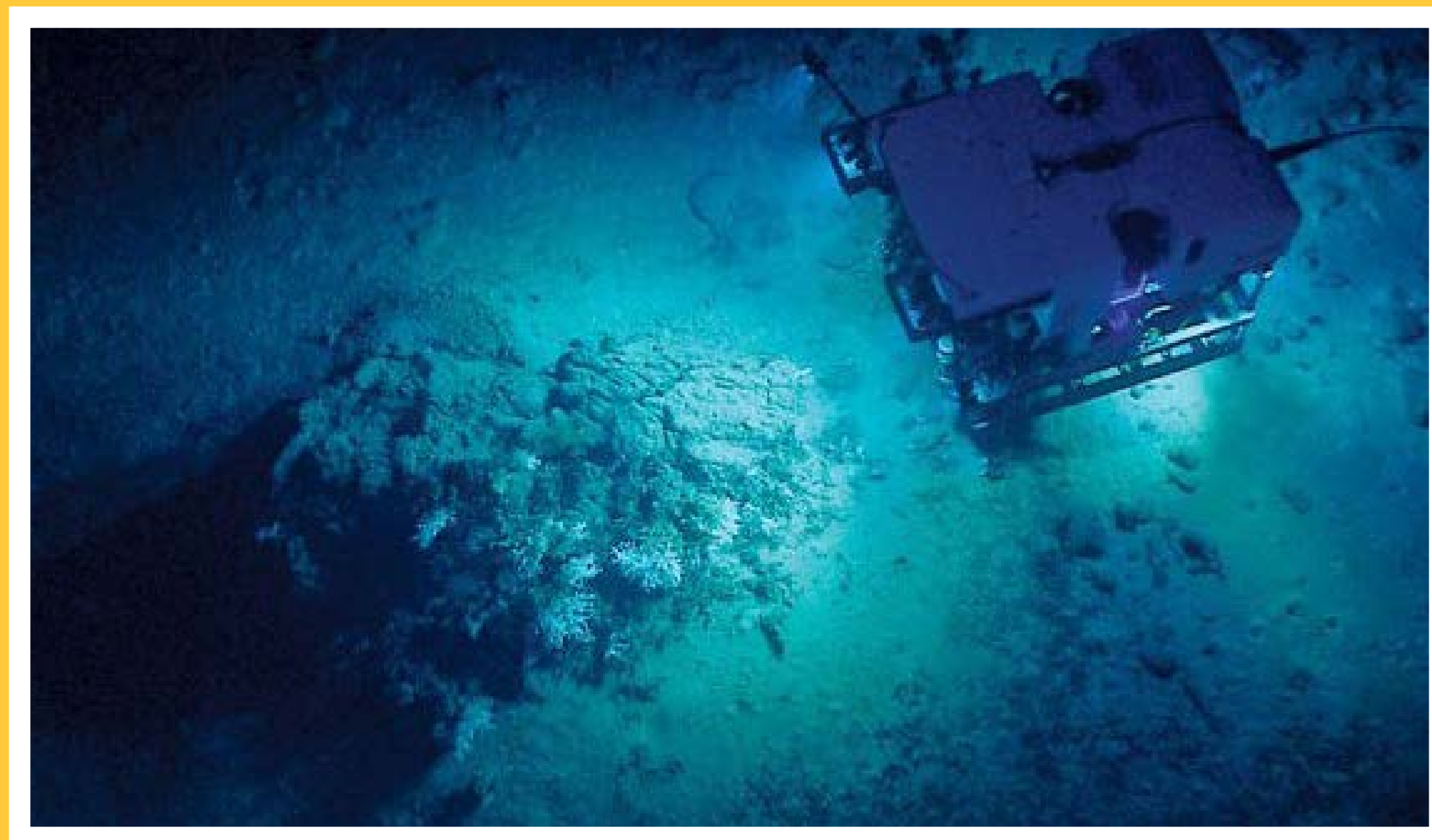
During an archeological dig in Armenia's Areni Cave, researchers unearthed an ancient wine press, at center, and a fermentation vat, at right.

Photograph courtesy of Gregory Areshian

director Alen Amirkhanyan praised the embassy's guidance and encouragement, saying it "unlocked possibilities of partnership among organizations such as one Armenia. "The embassy's crowd-funding team," he continued, "brought together a wide network of environmental and social organizations in Armenia to focus on our campaign to help clean up mining sites in the country."

Twitter connects ambassadors and embassies with potential partners in unprecedented ways. It helped Embassy Yerevan bring "Sesame Street" to Armenian TV, promote access to American universities' massive open online courses (MOOCs) and encourage girls' and women's soccer in Armenia.

More information on nontraditional partnerships can be found at the Department's Global Partnership Office (S/GP), which also offers informative training programs through FSI. ■



A remote-operated underwater vehicle (ROV) cruises the floor of the Gulf of Mexico.

Photo courtesy of NOAA



In the Wake of a Crisis

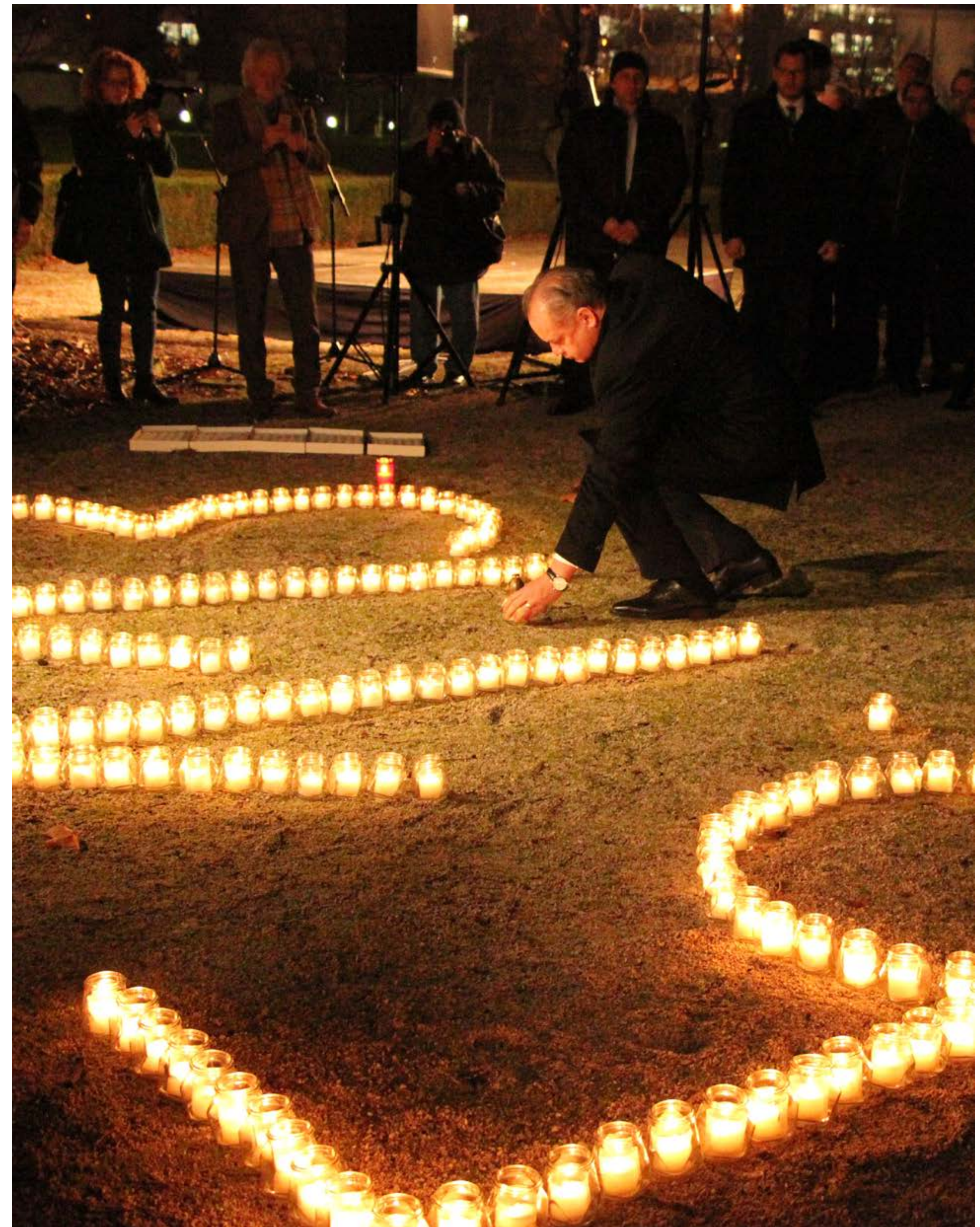
Embassy promotes acceptance of refugees

By Richard Fitzmaurice,
political officer, Embassy Bratislava

Europe's ongoing refugee and migrant crisis dominates the headlines in the Slovak Republic. Although few refugees have attempted to enter that nation over the past year, public support for assisting refugees remains low. Polls show that 76 percent of Slovaks oppose mandatory EU refugee quotas, the highest opposition level in the EU, and 70 percent express fear of refugees.

In this challenging environment, the U.S. Embassy in Bratislava has focused on outreach and programming to counter Slovaks' fear with facts and to point out refugees who have successfully integrated into Slovak society. In November, the embassy partnered with the Open Society Foundation to host a public discussion on refugees in the northern town of Zilina. There, Chargé d'Affaires (CDA) Liam Wasley called for a more humane approach to migration. Speakers on a panel included a naturalized Syrian émigré who has provided humanitarian assistance to refugees crossing Central Europe. The panel took local residents' questions and rebutted their fears, using facts on the scope and impact of the migration issue. The Syrian émigré, speaking fluent Slovak, shared anecdotes from his relief efforts and served as a positive example of an immigrant who has integrated into Slovak society and raised a family here.

With support from the Department's Julia Taft Refugee Fund, the embassy also awarded a grant to the locally based Human Rights League (HRL) for a year-long program focused on improving refugees' access to legal assistance. During the CDA's visit in December to HRL's Asylum Law Clinic at Trnava University, the school's dean expressed appreciation for the embassy's support, saying students like the clinic, as it provides a rare opportunity to apply classroom learning.



On International Migrants Day, Slovak President Andrej Kiska places a candle in memory of the 5,113 migrants who died or went missing in 2015.

Photo courtesy of International Organization for Migration



HRL Director Zuzana Stevulova said the Taft Fund grant enabled her organization to “reach law students and lawyers and educate them about the basic principles of refugee protection. [This] has never been more important for Slovakia, which lacks broader experience with refugees and needs to develop greater professional expertise in this area.”

The clinic students appeared motivated and knowledgeable about Slovak asylum law procedures, with one even referencing the Department’s Human Rights Report as a credible source to cite when documenting asylum claims. Over the next six months, HRL will provide additional training and seminars for lawyers and judges working on asylum cases, organize an international refugee law conference and asylum moot court competition for law students from neighboring countries, and conduct public outreach.

More recently, Embassy Bratislava received funding from the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs’ rapid reaction fund for integrating immigrant communities and used the funds to underwrite a 10 month program run by the Center for Research of Ethnicity and Culture. The group will train municipal workers who play a key role in the day-to-day aspects of refugee integration in Slovakia and discuss refugee rights and integration best practices with local officials from regions around Slovakia. As these representatives are influential members of their communities, they are well-placed to challenge anti-refugee assertions with facts and dispel myths about refugees through public outreach.

Embassy personnel have participated in public events emphasizing the humanitarian aspect of the migration crisis, including a candlelight vigil on International Migrants Day on Dec. 18. The event, a memorial for the 5,113 migrants killed or missing over the past year, was organized by the International Organization for Migration office in Slovakia. The speakers included Slovak President Andrej Kiska, an advocate of the humanitarian nature of Europe’s refugee and migrant crisis.

Experts believe most Slovaks—especially those outside of Bratislava—have little direct contact with refugees or knowledge of the facts about migration, which contributes to their fears and negative impressions of refugees. “Challenging these narratives with fact-based arguments and establishing communication between successfully integrated refugees and Slovakia’s majority population are key to changing public opinion and help us encourage countries to work with UNHCR and others to protect and safeguard refugees,” observed CDA Wasley. ■



An embassy-supported public discussion on refugees takes place in the Slovak town of Zilina.

Photo by Natalia Pindrochova



Staff of Embassy Bratislava pose for a photo with the director of the Center for Research of Ethnicity and Culture, Elena Gallova Kriglerova.

Photo by Igor Schneeweiss



On International Migrants Day, Slovak President Andrej Kiska places a candle in memory of the 5,113 migrants who died or went missing in 2015.

Photo courtesy of International Organization for Migration



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Human Rights League Director Zuzana Stevulova, far right, meets with refugees and Slovak President Kiska, fourth from left.

Photo courtesy of the Human Rights League



Staff of Embassy Bratislava pose for a photo with the director of the Center for Research of Ethnicity and Culture, Elena Gallova Kriglerova.

Photo by Igor Schneeweiss

From Spinning to Bingo

Kabul staff knows resiliency's secret

By Tanya Brothen, assistant information officer, U.S. Embassy in Kabul



Runners line up for a race around the Embassy Kabul compound.

Photo by Embassy Kabul

No one could argue that serving at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul is one of the most challenging assignments in the Foreign Service, calling for separation from families, rustic living conditions, a six (or sometimes seven)-day workweek and heightened security awareness.

But Kabul is also one of the most rewarding assignments—not just professionally. Kabul is a close-knit post because embassy colleagues have come together to shape their own lives in the true spirit of community resilience. Although security concerns restrict travel, compound residents have made their own homegrown fun, launching exercise classes, crafting parties, game nights and language groups. Most of these are employee-initiated, organized and run, but open to the entire community.

For employees' physical fitness, there are now yoga, CrossFit and Zumba classes taught by community members. Runners, meanwhile, have organized 5- and 10-kilometer races by mapping routes over embassy walkways and the adjoining NATO property. Swimmers, too, have created swim routines

for each other, meeting to swim laps twice a week. Many of the on-compound fitness instructors got their training in Kabul by attending the classes they now teach.

Spinning—group exercise on stationary bikes—is big at post; in fact, the spin group counts more than 80 members and is grooming the next generation of its instructors. Ami Ballenger, an Office of Inspector General management analyst, said she had taken a few spin classes before her Afghanistan tour, and started spinning in Kabul to meet new people. “There is a strong camaraderie among Kabul spinners,” she said.

Now, she's become an instructor.

Spinning is one of the most popular activities in Kabul, and spinners often arrive to class early to snare a bike. There are nine spinning classes weekly. The group's “century” spins on major holidays involve riding what would be 100 miles on a bike, four hours straight, with a goal of 25 miles per hour.

“It's fun, and I love the camaraderie and the music,” said Department Medical Officer Deborah Edwards.

The spin group also assists in public outreach. Embassy Kabul spinners hosted the Afghan national women's cycling team three times in 2015, once for a joint U.S.-Afghan biking session.

The post offers more leisurely pursuits such as crafting parties, a bridge club, dart groups and quiz nights. Crafters have held sessions on jewelry design, dreamcatcher making and painting, while trivia buffs form teams and compete for gift certificates to the employee association's on-compound convenience stores. Spanish speakers get together on Wednesdays at lunchtime to brush up on their Español.

Another popular leisure activity is bingo, which is held every other Wednesday and attracts more than 30 participants for 10 rounds of play. Deputy Human Resources



Officer Paul Dever, a founder of bingo night, usually operates the wheel, calls out numbers and confirms winners. Entry is free and there's a popcorn machine for snacking. Everyone leaves with a prize, anything from a USAID mug to an Xbox gaming console (generously donated by another founder before departing Kabul).

"Bingo is about coming together and relaxing after a hard day's work," Dever said. "Life can get stressful here sometimes, and I like volunteering to help others and myself to cope with being away from family. Bingo is a simple thing, but it helps."

Embassy Kabul's newest community activity is a revival of the knitting group Knit Wits. Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer Judith Spanberger thought there might be knitters on the compound, so she volunteered to lead a class and ordered knitting needles and beginner's books online. She expected to teach about five people, she said. Instead, 10 showed up for the first class.

"I didn't realize there would be so much interest in knitting," she said. "It's wonderful, and the best way to learn how to knit is to work in a group. Plus, it's such a nice way to meet new people and socialize."

Knitting has become so popular, it has split into two groups, with Spanberger and USAID Controller Amanda Levenson each teaching one. Now each side of the compound has a class, which is good since the East and West compounds are separated by a road.

Employee-run activities flourish at Embassy Kabul, in part, due to the support they receive from the Community Liaison Office (CLO), which encourages community members to propose new social groups based on their own interests and supports those who wish to host an activity. "Most of the activities here develop organically," said Hope Williams-Blanton, co-coordinator of the CLO. "Someone will approach us with an idea for an activity they would like to lead, and we go from there." She noted, for example, that a Toastmasters

group is set to launch, and the embassy has screened the film "Star Wars: The Force Awakens."

"We do our best to ensure the group has supplies if needed, and we also advertise the programmatic activities to the community through various channels, such as email, our newsletter and activity boards around the compound," she added. The other CLO coordinator, Beatriz Ossa, said the post's activities are so varied, "there is truly something for everyone." She noted the jazz, chess and Latin dance groups, and said new ones start all the time. The CLO Creative Corners area has new knitting classes, and there was a 5-kilometer race on Veterans Day.

"We even have a waiting list for tennis classes that just started when one of our community members offered to give lessons to anyone on compound," she said.

Serving in Kabul comes with hardships, such as lengthy separations from family and restricted mobility, but there is also a strong and rewarding sense of community that many residents say they've never experienced anywhere else. Despite long work hours and limited access to local resources, community members find time to relax and pursue old and new hobbies at the embassy. ■



Gathered for a staff photo are members of the embassy's Community Liaison Office, which supports the activities that keep compound residents active.

Photo by Musadeq Sadeq



Ten Ways to Enhance Personal Resilience

By Beth Payne, associate dean, Foreign Service Institute

We all know that if we exercise regularly, eat well and get adequate sleep we will become healthier and more resilient. But, too often, we stop there. We also need to incorporate resilience-enhancing activities into our lifestyles and make time for these activities in the same way we make time for eating healthy, sleeping and exercising.

Ten ways to boost resilience:

- Rest Your Brain: Meditation is an effective way to rest your brain (focusing on only one thing at a time); other ways include yoga, art work, gardening, jigsaw puzzles and photography.
- Stay Connected: Virtual communication isn't enough. Everyone needs a supportive network of other people and to spend time with others.
- Manage Your Workload: Working long hours hurts productivity and resilience. If you have to work long hours, take regular breaks and take time off to rejuvenate.
- Have a Passion: Find a hobby outside of work that feeds your passions.
- Practice Moderation: Avoid excessive alcohol and over-indulging in other practices, such as spending money or eating.
- Be Altruistic: Help other people, such as volunteering in your community.
- Laugh: Laugh often, watch comedy shows and movies, encourage joy and laughter in the workplace.
- Be Grateful: Say thank you to people who help you and think every day about what you are grateful for.
- Know Yourself: Listen to yourself and be honest about what you can and cannot do. Ask for help, when needed.
- Subscribe to FSI's Resilience Blog: For weekly resilience tips and to share your experiences and suggestions, subscribe to FSI's blog on fostering resilience at <http://wordpress.state.gov/fosteringresilience>

If you find that you are experiencing characteristics of low resilience that are severe and last for long periods or interfere with your normal functioning, seek help through MED Employee Consultative Services or your physician or mental health professional. For resilience training at your post or in your office, email the FSI Transition Center's Resilience Project at FSITCResilience@state.gov.

POLAD at Work

Adviser attends regional security conference

By Bridget F. Gersten, Department of State POLAD, U.S. Army South



I attended the 2015 Conference of the American Armies (CAA) in November in Bogotá as a Department of State foreign policy advisor, or POLAD, assigned to U.S. Army South, based in San Antonio, Texas. In that role, my mission at CAA was to advise Major General Clarence “K.K.” Chinn, that army’s commanding general, on U.S. policies and foreign policy issues relevant to each of the armies of the CAA’s 20 member nations.

Maj. Gen. Chinn led the November 2015 U.S. delegation at the Extraordinary Commanders’ Meeting in Bogotá on behalf of the U.S. Chief of Staff of the Army, who spoke at the conference’s closing ceremony. As the Army’s service component for U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), U.S. Army South, too, had spent months planning this event, which encompassed countries in the Department’s Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs.

The POLAD program, part of the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, involves more than 90 assignments at Department of Defense Combatant Commands worldwide. Domestic assignments are for two years; overseas ones are for three years, except in Djibouti, Qatar and Afghanistan.

Maj. Gen. Chinn, commanding general for Army operations under SOUTHCOM, said having a POLAD at the CAA Commander’s Conference was an “absolutely essential role as we strengthened existing relationships and friendships, and forged new ones with our regional partners.”

This year’s CAA conference theme, “Emerging Threats in the 21st Century,” was particularly relevant, as the November terrorist acts in Paris had just occurred and humanitarian crises abounded, such as that involving the plight of Syrian refugees. The conference occurred against a backdrop of other high-level, multilateral talks such as the Global Climate Conference (COP21) in Paris.

Colombia itself was an ideal conference venue since the nation is in the process of approving a peace accord, ending 51 years of armed insurgency that has left more than 220,000 dead and 6 million internally displaced. At the conference, the Colombian peace process provided context for broader strategic and multilateral discussions about effective regional approaches to countering transnational crime, protecting borders, and providing security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, in coordination with civil authorities and conforming to partner nation constitutions.

To prepare for the conference, I worked with U.S. Army South and Pentagon support staff before traveling to Colombia, to build relationships with each delegation member and to support U.S. leadership during the three-day event. The CAA was founded initially in 1960 as a forum for army commanders to discuss security and defense issues and now serves as a forum for commanders across the Americas to examine issues, identify ways to collaborate, build relationships and protect citizens against global and regional threats.

This 2015 session of the Extraordinary Commanders’ Meeting was the first to bring together army commanders since 2012. In Bogotá, 18 commanding generals represented armies from Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador,



At the conference's end, POLAD Gersten joins Army South Commanding Maj. Gen. Chinn, center right, in congratulating members of the Colombian military.

Photos by Carol McClellan

the United States, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay, as well as the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB).

At the conference, the United States announced it would host the next cycle of the CAA as Permanent Executive Secretariat, meaning that, for 2016–2018, the United States will work shoulder-to-shoulder with armies and security forces from across North America, Central America, South America and the Caribbean, focusing on the role of the interagency community in providing humanitarian assistance and disaster response operations.

The conference began with a call for continued collaboration, cooperation and coordination of the CAA member armies. In U.S. military parlance, this approach combining elements of national power is called the DIME (Diplomacy, Information, Military, and Economics) paradigm. Those in the diplomatic community sometimes refer to it as the “3 Ds,” (Diplomacy, Development, and Defense) of national security. Both the 3D and DIME concepts are in keeping with principles of the Department’s annual Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review and involve a whole-of-government or interagency approach combining the resources and expertise of the Departments of State and Defense, and USAID.

In either case, the goal is to protect and promote U.S. national security abroad.

Throughout the conference, it was clear that America’s hemispheric partners also value the interagency community in their domestic and international affairs.

During the CAA, I spoke with several army generals and their delegations. I had met several of these leaders during earlier events at U.S. Army South, including the 2014 and 2015 PANAMAX exercises, bilateral Army Staff Talks and at other official meetings in San Antonio, and other locations. Having been a POLAD for more than a year, I’ve learned of the bond that foreign alumni of the U.S. Army War College and other U.S. military educational institutions have for the United States. Foreign commanders often speak of their appreciation for the U.S. security assistance programs, too, citing the Department of State-funded International Military Education Training (IMET), Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) programs.

The Colombian army ran the CAA conference smoothly and on the event’s final night hosted a “Night of the Heroes” to honor the sacrifices of Colombian soldiers fighting for peace in their homeland. The Colombian army conveyed highlights of the event on Twitter as well.

Before traveling home, the army generals gathered with the U.S. Army Chief of Staff, General Mark A. Milley, who spoke of the value of partnerships in creating a safer and more secure world. In all, the CAA conference united partners and allies in an open dialogue that focused on shared interests and concerns, and on supporting democracy, rule of law and human rights. More information about it is on the CAA website, redcea.com, and the Facebook page of U.S. Army South. ■



BRACING FOR ZIKA

Medical Report

The Department issues precautions

By Gregory J. Martin, M.D., Chief,
Tropical Medicine-Infectious Diseases, Office of Medical Services

First discovered in 1947 in the Zika Forest of Uganda, the Zika virus lived in obscurity for 60 years, causing only occasional mild illness in small outbreaks in Africa. Suddenly, in 2007, Zika infections exploded on the Pacific island of Yap, rapidly infecting approximately 70 percent of the population and spreading to other Pacific islands and Southeast Asia. French Polynesia also had a very large outbreak with the same pattern of mild illness—fever, rash, joint, body and headaches. In fact, despite thousands of infections, hospitalizations were rare and no deaths were attributed directly to Zika infection.

The Zika virus is a member of a family of viruses called the flaviviruses, most of which are transmitted by mosquito bites. Zika is carried by a number of species of day-biting mosquito called Aedes, which have been responsible for massive worldwide outbreaks of dengue and, more recently, the unrelated (but clinically similar) chikungunya virus. Aedes are common urban mosquitoes throughout the

tropics, subtropics and are found seasonally even in many temperate areas. With Zika infections rising in Asia and the Pacific, it was really no surprise when Zika appeared on Easter Island (Chile) and then in 2015 in Brazil. In large urban populations Aedes mosquitoes can spread the Zika virus very quickly. Northeast Brazil became ground zero and from there infections spread to South and Central America.

Currently, 26 countries, mostly in Latin America and the Caribbean, have active Zika virus transmission; it can occur anywhere Aedes mosquitoes are present, including a significant portion of the United States. The world medical community observed the advance of Zika but was not as concerned with it as it was with its far more dangerous cousins: dengue and yellow fever. When physicians in northeast Brazil last year began to notice an increase in the number of cases of microcephaly, a rare condition that caused babies to be born with small brains, alarm bells went off. In some

areas, microcephaly was 20-25 times more common than reported previously; this occurred concomitantly with the widespread outbreak of Zika virus infections. As tissue samples from some fetuses or babies that died were examined there were disturbing indications that Zika virus was present. Whether Zika was a bystander or the cause of these deformities was the key question. Some of the same areas also saw significant increase in a rare autoimmune condition called Guillain Barre Syndrome (GBS), which leads to temporary paralysis.

The microcephaly and GBS association was concerning enough that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a Level 2 Travel Alert for pregnant women to avoid regions with active Zika virus transmission. The World Health Organization also announced a public health emergency regarding the increased cases of microcephaly and GBS in the regions. To further complicate matters, Zika virus may be transmitted through sexual contact. This led the CDC to issue additional interim guidelines.

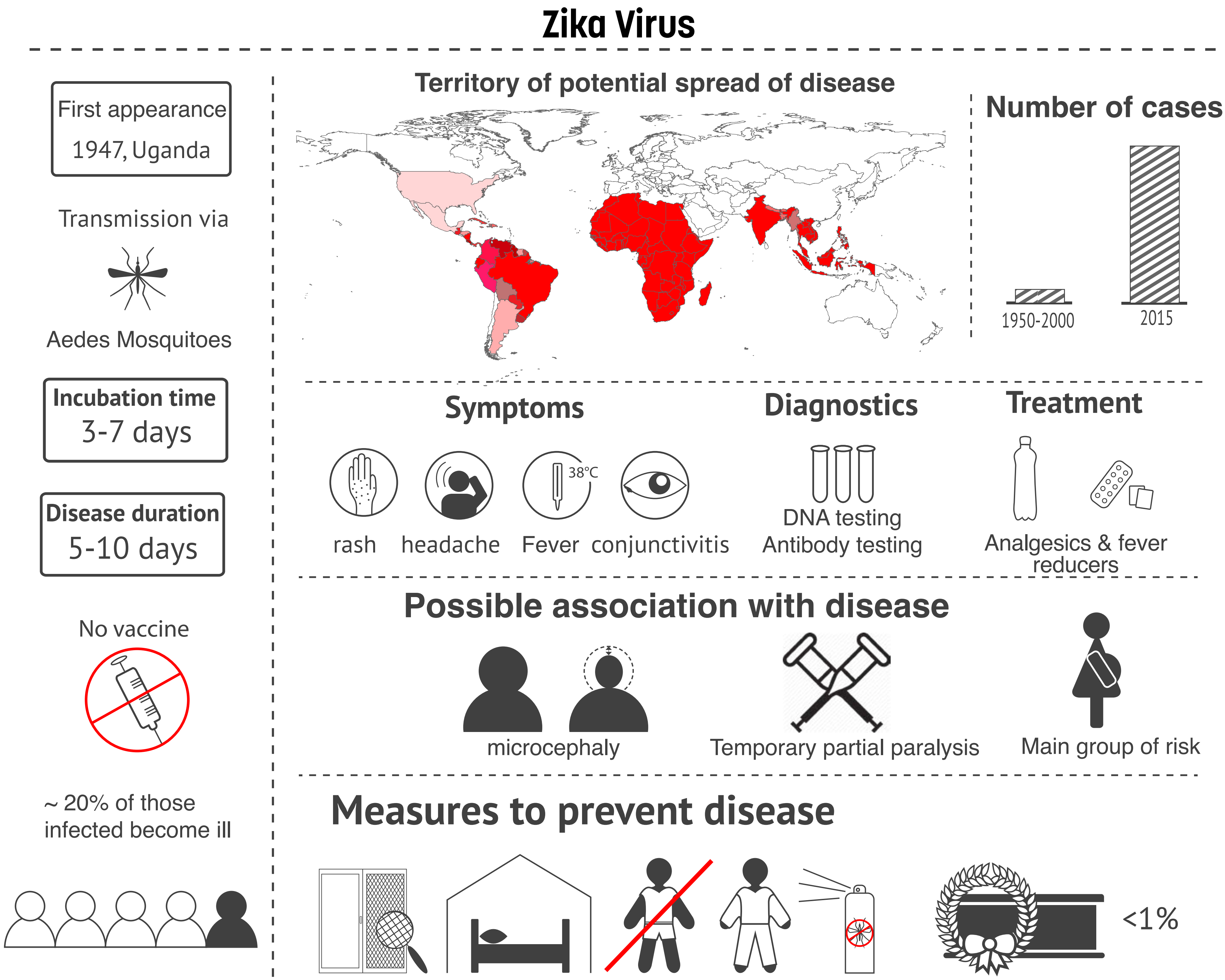
Zika’s association with microcephaly was not obvious in other areas that experienced Zika infections, and the question remains why northeast Brazil has seen such an increase. Could there be another cause or a cofactor such as heavy metal contamination, a pollutant, insecticide/larvicide or even another unknown coinfection that is causing these fetal deformities? Is the increase in GBS due to Zika or also a similar cofactor?

The Office of Medical Services (MED) responded to the Travel Alert by encouraging pregnant women to discuss the Zika risk with their post’s medical provider

and consider whether to curtail or take early medical evacuation from Zika-affected areas. Many U.S. embassies in Latin America are in areas where no Zika is reported or at elevations where Aedes mosquitoes do not live. Posts such as Bogotá, Mexico City, Quito and La Paz are protected from dengue, malaria and Zika because of their altitude, and families can feel safe from these mosquito-borne illnesses. The Department is warning pregnant women traveling to Zika Travel Alert areas to consider deferring travel until after childbirth. Due to the frequent changes in recommendations, MED established a MED Alert: Zika SharePoint website that has background information, frequently asked questions, helpful links and Department policy regarding Zika. The site is updated frequently.

The CDC, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and numerous other organizations are intensively investigating the Zika virus. Studies are ongoing to help determine what factors may be associated with microcephaly and GBS. Babies already born in the region are being studied to see if other more subtle deformities are present. Retrospective research in Oceania is seeking to determine if deformities were overlooked during outbreaks there.

Prevention of mosquito bites remains the only way to prevent Zika infections. Zika vaccine development has been jump-started by all nations experienced in producing vaccines against other flaviviruses. The CDC is developing advanced diagnostics to help determine when infections occur and screening for pregnant women who were in Zika-affected areas. We can expect more developments over the coming weeks and months and encourage employees to visit the MED Alert: Zika, CDC and PAHO websites for accurate updates. ■

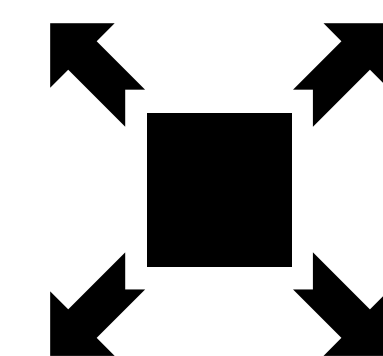


Solar Panel Array Debuts at Embassy



U.S. Ambassador to Argentina Noah Mamet displays the new solar panel array serving the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires. The embassy is the first diplomatic mission in the city to install solar panels to power its consular facilities and other operations. The inaugural event made headlines in major Argentine media outlets and effectively highlighted U.S. climate change policies. ■

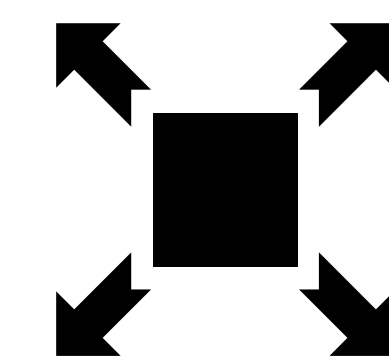
Photo by Courtney Ho



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Writing Contest Fights Corruption



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Two winners of the U.S. Embassy in Chisinau's anti-corruption-related writing contest are, from left, holding certificates, Corneliu Doni and Grigori Cojocaru, winners in the age 20–30 category. The contest, held for the U.N.'s Anti-Corruption Day, Dec. 9, had the theme "Prevention of Corruption is Necessary for Future Development" with writers discussing how corruption affects education, health, justice, democracy, prosperity and Moldovan society, and how to address it. ■ *Photo by the American Resource Center at Embassy Chisinau*

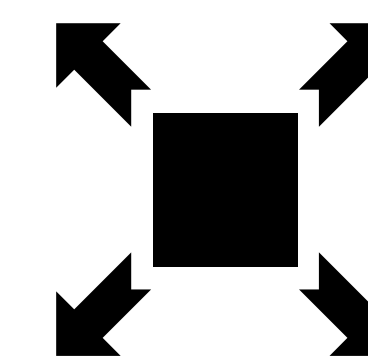
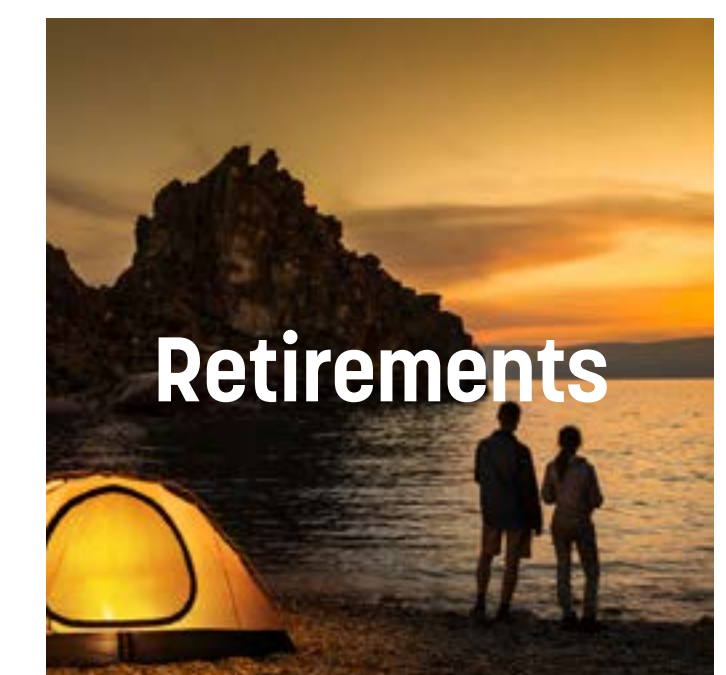


Post Sponsors Break Dancer



At center in white, American dancer Anthony Cabrera, known as B-boy Omen, watches as a young break dancer does a spin at a workshop he held in Kohtla-Järve, a mostly Russian-speaking city in northeastern Estonia where break dancing is popular with youth. Sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Tallinn, Cabrera held the workshops in December at a local youth and cultural center, helping the embassy engage with youth on values, sports and diversity. More than 25 enthusiasts participated. ■

Photo by Filipp Mustonen



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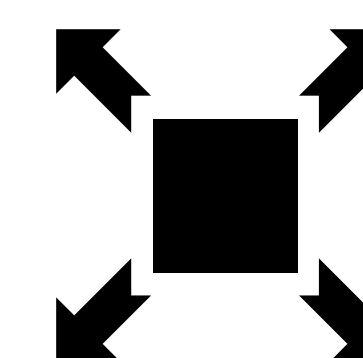
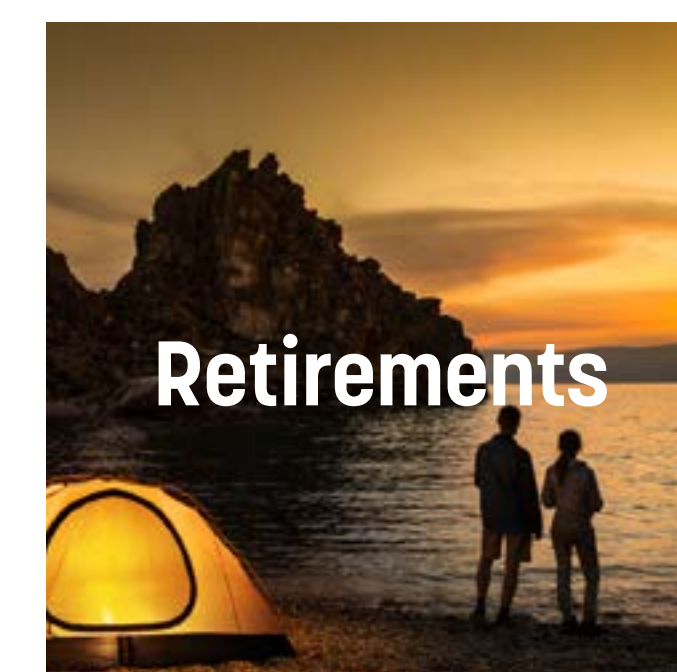


Tel Aviv Welcomes Student Leaders



Members of the public diplomacy team at the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv welcome back a group of students in the Middle East Partnership Initiative, a six-week exchange program to the United States involving approximately 120 undergraduates from the Middle East and North Africa. Participants develop leadership and their understanding of civil society and the democratic process. ■

Photo by Manal Haddad



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Retirements

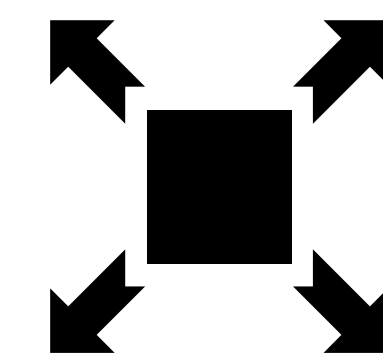
Civil Service

Al-Khateeb, Soubhi S.
 Allsbury, Thomas C.
 Avila, Cheryl A.
 Bergeron, Alberic Joseph
 Blankenship, Sherry L.
 Celeste, Judith
 Chen, Chuan Yuan
 Cook, Daphne Wilson
 Cote, Linda M.
 Cunningham, Dennis L.
 Domingo, Wilma M.
 Ferguson, Cynthia H.
 Ford, Robert J.
 Francis, Kathy K.
 Gibson, Ann S.
 Godby, Terry L.
 Hodges, Carolyn Corine
 Kirby, Michael R.
 Laws, Julia M.
 Lester, Joyce A.
 Lewis, James B.
 Lo Faro, Maria-Antonietta L.

Loverde, Martha L.
 Malikov, Babur
 Martin, Rhonda Jo
 Miller, Keith
 Montesano, Marvis Elaine
 Pike, Clyde E.
 Rider, Merry N.
 Robbins, Cynthia B.
 Rogers, Susan K.
 Rosenburg, Richard L.
 Sands, Vance H.
 Serey, Mary Ellen
 Suarez, Steven Raul
 Thompson, Deborah A.
 Urbina De Breen, Marlene

Foreign Service

Allison, Douglas A.
 Baker, Margaret Weber
 Burge, Jody K.
 Camp, Beatrice A.
 Cates, David Lee
 Chaudhry, Mohammad A.
 De Rosa, Ferdinand J.
 Glaser, Kathleen M.
 Goldbeck, Brian L.
 Lopez, Jane Yu
 Macy, Marguerite
 McCarthy, Patricia M.
 Noor, Mohamud A.
 Olsin-Windecker, Hilary S.
 Pacheco, Martha A.
 Richhart Jr., Raymond D.
 Ruggiero, Robert J.
 Rumpf, Eric N.
 Sakla, Cecile Francoise
 Sanders, Jesse L.
 Valdez, Phillip M.
 Widenhouse, Stephen



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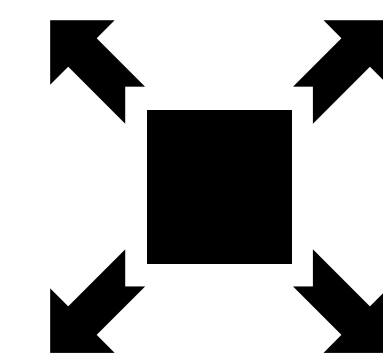


Ethics Answers

Q: A university from my home state has offered to award me an honorary degree based on my years of work in foreign policy. I will receive no compensation for the degree. May I accept it?

A: To accept an honorary degree, an employee must request and receive a written determination from the Ethics Office. The Ethics Office will consider whether the degree-granting institution is a qualified institution under the applicable ethics regulation and whether the timing of the degree would cause a reasonable person to question the employee's impartiality in a matter affecting the institution. Prior to accepting, you should send an email to the ethics attorney's mailbox at: ethicsattorneymailbox@state.gov. In your email, be sure to include the name of the university and whether it is, or is expected to be, involved in any official matters handled by your office. Please also forward any correspondence regarding the award and indicate if you anticipate receiving any gifts associated with the degree.

Ethics Answers presents hypothetical ethical scenarios Department employees might face. For help with real ethics questions, email ethicsattorneymailbox@state.gov.



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End State



Rio de Janeiro seen from Sugarloaf Mountain.
Photo by Christian Haugen